

Church Order

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

(2013 Edition)



Based on the Church Order of the
Synod of Dordrecht 1618 & 1619

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Table of Contents

Contents	Page
Preface	6
PREAMBLE	8
Article 1: Purpose and Content of the Church Order	8
OF THE OFFICES	8
Article 2: The Offices of the Church	8
Article 3: Who May Not Officiate as Minister of the Word	8
Article 4: Admission to the Office of Minister of the Word	9
Article 5: Calling of Ministers to Another Congregation	10
Article 6: Calling to a Special Work	20
Article 7: A Particular Congregation	20
Article 8: Ministers without Theological Training	20
Article 9: Admission of New Members into the Ministry	22
Article 10: Accepting a Call Elsewhere	23
Article 11: Support of Ministers	23
Article 12: Changes to Another State of Life	24
Article 13: Emeritation	24
Article 14: Temporary Absence from Service	26
Article 15: Preaching Elsewhere	26
Article 16: The Task of the Ministers of the Word	26
Article 17: Equality of Ministers	26
Article 18: The Tasks of Professors of Theology	27
Article 19: Training for the Ministry of the Word	27
Article 20: Theological Training	27
Article 21: Evangelization and Foreign Missions	27
Article 22: Election of Elders	27
Article 23: Duties of Elders	28
Article 24: Election of Deacons	28
Article 25: Duties of Deacons	28
Article 26: The Deaconate and Ministries of Mercy	28
Article 27: Terms of Office for Elder and Deacon	28
Article 28: Relation to Authorities	29

OF ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES	29
Article 29: On Ecclesiastical Assemblies	29
Article 30: The Authority of Ecclesiastical Assemblies	29
Article 31: Right of Appeal	29
Article 32: Proceedings	30
Article 33: Credentials	30
Article 34: President of Synod	30
Article 35: Secretary and Clerk	30
Article 36: Jurisdiction of Major Assemblies over Minor	31
Article 37: The Consistory of the Local Church	31
Article 38: Organization of New Consistories and Congregations	31
Article 39: Concerning Preaching Stations	31
Article 40: Meetings of the Deacons	32
Article 41 – The Meeting of the Combined Consistories	32
Article 42: Concerning Advisory Members	33
Article 43: Concerning Church Censure	33
Article 44: Church Visitation	33
Article 45: Church Archives	34
Article 46: Overtures for Major Assemblies	34
Article 47: Correspondence with other Combined Consistory Meetings	34
Article 48: Synodical Committees	34
Article 49: Deputies of Synod	35
Article 50: Meetings of Synod	35
Article 51: Other Churches	37
OF DOCTRINE	39
Article 52: Signing of the Form of Subscription by Ministers	39
Article 53: Signing by the Elders and Deacons	40
Article 54: The Necessity of Christian Education	40
Article 55: Perverse Literature and Worldly Amusements	40
OF THE SACRAMENTS AND OTHER CEREMONIES	40
Article 56: Concerning Holy Baptism	40
Article 57: The Duties of Parents Concerning Baptism	41
Article 58: The Use of Forms	41
Article 59: The Baptism of Adults	41

Article 60: The Proper Administration of Baptism	41
Article 61: Admission to the Lord’s Supper	42
Article 62: The Administration of the Lord’s Supper	43
Article 63: The Observation and Frequency of the Lord’s Supper	43
Article 64: Worship Services	43
Article 65: Funerals	44
Article 66: Prayer Days	44
Article 67: Lord’s Day Observance	44
Article 68: Catechism Preaching	45
Article 69: Church Singing	45
Article 70: Marriage Stipulations	45
OF DISCIPLINE AND ECCLESIASTICAL ADMONITIONS	47
Article 71: Censure of Members	47
Article 72: Secret Sins and Implementation of Matt. 18:15-17	47
Article 73: Repentance After Admonition	47
Article 74: Actions Against the Duly Admonished Unrepentant	47
Article 75: Public Declaration of Sin	48
Article 76: Suspension from the Lord’s Supper	48
Article 77: Excommunication	48
Article 78: Readmission to Church Membership	50
Article 79: Discipline of Office–Bearers	51
Article 80: Restoration of Office–Bearers	51
OF VARIOUS REGULATIONS	52
Article 82: Certificate of Membership	52
Article 83: The Needy	52
Article 84: Legal Security	53
Article 85: Jurisdiction of Local Churches	53
Article 86: Revision of Church Order	53

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 was no recognition of the need for a version of the old Church Order of Dordrecht of 1618-19 that was in the language of our churches and adjusted to our peculiar situation; however, there was so much to do and so few people to do it.

Among those who worked on it and who are no longer with us, we call special attention to the names of Rev. C. Noordegraaf, Rev. J. Tamminga and Elder Frank VandenBout (of Grand Rapids). A word of thanks is also due to Rev. L.W. Bilkes who, together with these men, did so much to produce the first draft in English. Rev. P. VanderMeyden in particular 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.A. Schouls was instrumental through this process as a key member of the Publications Committee, under which responsibility for the Church Order rested until 2009. In 2004, the format changed from loose-leaf to a convenient pocket-sized published edition, through the work of Rev. C.A. Schouls, Rev. H. VanEssen and brother C. VanDoodewaard.

Several changes have been made to the Church Order in the past couple of years. A significant change comes as a result of the institution of assemblies called “Combined Consistory Meetings.” These assemblies of consistory delegates serve the regional churches (West, East and South) as opportunities for mutual consultation in the interim between annual synods.

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 denominational website

(www.frcna.org) and as well as in printed format (See *Acts of Synod 2010*, Art. 36).

With the anticipation that updated versions will now be made available on-line, two changes have been introduced to assist in accurate referencing. The title now includes the year of the edition and all changes in subsequent editions will now include a reference to the Acts of Synod article where the decision to change the language was made. In some cases references also serve to clarify the reading. Some further changes were approved by Synod 2013.

The Apostle Paul said “let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40), referring 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 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. However 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, Secretary
Calgary, April 2013

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 organization 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 Combined Consistory 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 Combined Consistory, 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. The Combined Consistory shall examine him as to his motives, spiritual gifts, purity of confession, ability to expound the Scriptures, and gifts of public address. If the result of this examination is favourable (with the advice of synodical deputies) such a person is given approval to labour in his particular congregation.

- B. No one may be permitted to speak an edifying word in the congregations of the Combined Consistory to which he belongs without first being presented by his Consistory to the Combined Consistory for examination as to his motives, spiritual gifts, purity of confession, ability to expound the Scriptures, and gifts of public address. If the result of this examination is favourable (with the advice of synodical deputies) such a person is given approval to labour in this particular region of Combined Consistory.
- C. 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.
- D. In the event such a brother changes his residence out of the jurisdiction of his region of Combined Consistory, he forfeits this right.
- E. 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. (*Acts of Synod 2011*, Article 14)

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**, of both 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 Counselor appointed for this

purpose by the Synod. 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 this purpose by the Consistory and of the general ecclesiastical ordinances with the approbation of Synod (via CONTRACTA), 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 Synod (via CONTRACTA) must give permission, after the meeting has judged the grounds on which the second call rests (See *Acts of Synod 2013*, #33, p.32). 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. **CONTRACTA:** Synod's approbation of the credentials given to a minister, in accordance with Article 10, can be done by two consistories designated by Synod, which shall invite all the Consistories to their meeting. By their absence, the invited Consistories are considered as having given their approbation. These two consistories, as **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, and *Acts of Synod 2011*, p.86)
- 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 a foreign country should not be called during the first three years of his pastorate (see *Acts of Synod 1963*; and *Acts of Synod 2013*, #33, p.32). (for Concept Regulations for the Election and Calling of Ministers of the Word: see Supplement No. A-1; For 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 in a relationship of correspondence with our denomination (see Art. 51), the following regulations shall apply (*Acts of Synod 2013*, #33, p.32):
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. His Consistory and the two Consistories mentioned in Article 5, Sub.C, as 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.
4. The Consistory shall, with the advice of the counselor, give to the minister an official release. (Supplement No.15)

G. Calling ministers and candidates from other denominations:

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.
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 following procedure must be followed:
 - a. 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.
 - b. The deputies cannot give permission to extend a call. They must report to Synod, which decides whether or not the minister may be called.

- c. Synod, in making such a decision, shall conduct an examination similar to a candidacy examination. 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.
- d. If permission to issue a call is granted the Consistory may propose him to the congregation. If the call is issued and accepted he may be installed without further examination.
3. With respect to calling ministers belonging to a denomination with which we have a Complete Correspondence relationship, deputies may make a decision. If the call is issued and accepted the minister may be installed without further examination.
4. A candidate, regardless of which denomination, 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.
5. At every colloquium doctum or examination, Synod shall be assisted by deputies of Interchurch Relations. (*Acts of Synod 2012, Article 24*)

H. When a minister of our churches accepts a call to a denomination with which our churches maintain a correspondence relationship (see Art. 51), the following rules shall apply (Acts of Synod 2013, #33, p.32):

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 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:
 - i. After the rules mention in (a) to (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.
 - ii. During the same time the procedure mentioned in (h) to (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 license 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 license 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:

- a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - i. 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.
 - ii. 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 Synod. Synod 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 Synod.

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 male member, 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 Combined Consistory, following the procedure approved by Synod, shall first examine him. (*Acts of Synod 2013, #33, p.32*) If the preliminary judgment is favourable, he shall be given the right to speak a word of edification in several congregations of the denomination for further review of his gifts and the Synod shall then 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. A man 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 Synod.
3. In the event of a favourable decision, the applicant is recommended to the Combined Consistory by means of a full, written report from his Consistory.
4. The Combined Consistory 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 Combined Consistory shall recommend the applicant 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 Combined Consistory 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 judgment of the Synod is favourable it will conduct a peremptory examination of the applicant. The Synod shall give him some time to 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 of this to the Synod. After receiving favourable reports from these Consistories the Synod can proceed to his 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 Synod; likewise, no other church may receive him until he has presented a proper certificate of dismissal from the church 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 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 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 the church visitors, Combined Consistory and Synod have been unsuccessful, resulting in an intolerable situation. (*Acts of Synod 2009*, Article 29)
- C. A plan with regard to the financial obligations of the congregation toward its dismissed minister must be proposed by the Consistory and approved by the 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 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 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 presents himself to Synod to request each such extension.

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 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 office 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 Synod. A minister may request emeritation at the age of 65 years. If he requests emeritation before the age of 65 years, he is to submit certificates of two medical doctors.
2. When a minister, due to illness, requests emeritation before the age of 65 years, the Consistory shall grant him at least half a year of sick-leave before applying for emeritation at Synod
3. Emeritation shall not take place if the disciplinary measure of suspension is applicable.
4. In cases of emeritation before the age of 65 years, Synod is to investigate whether the incapability of performing the office mentioned in Article 13 has possibly ceased and, if so, emeritation must be withdrawn.

B. Emeritation Procedure:

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

1. Synod shall seriously try to maintain the principle of Article 13, which is that Synod shall only grant emeritation 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 emeritus applications the declarations of medical doctors are to be considered decisive. With regard to this, Synod 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 Synod.
3. In dubious cases, as, for example, when a minister's request for emeritation 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, Synod is seriously to consider whether or not a satisfactory solution other than that of emeritus declaration can be found.
4. In connection with this it is not advisable that Synod grant temporary emeritation, since it conflicts with the principle of Article 13.
5. Synodical Deputies in charge of the Emeritus Fund, upon receiving the application from the Consistory concerned, are obliged to grant support to that church, in accordance with the existing stipulations. (See *Minutes of Classis Fall - 1956*)

C. Emeritation Privileges:

1. Emeritation shall begin on the day set by Synod. From the date on which emeritation 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, emeritus payments, guaranteed by the congregation and stipulated in the call letter in accordance with existing regulations, shall begin.
2. If an emeritus 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. (*Acts of Synod 2012, Article 41*)

Article 14: Temporary Absence from Service

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 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 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 judgment of the Consistory and, if necessary, of the Combined Consistory; 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. Ordinarily, the Consistory shall present twice as many nominees as the number to be chosen however, in exceptional circumstances and after they have requested, received and duly considered the advice of the church counselor, single nominees may be permitted. 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, re-elected officers should be re-installed. (*Acts of Synod 2012, Article 24*)

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 Combined Consistories and the Synod.

- a. Other Assemblies: Another kind of ecclesiastical assembly is the *Particular or Regional Synod*. (see articles 47-49)
- b. 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 anyone 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.

- a. 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 appellant.

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 Combined Consistory has the same authority over the Consistory as the Synod has over the Combined Consistory.

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: Institution of New Churches

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 Synod.

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 Combined Consistory 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 the Combined Consistories

Three regional assemblies, called “Combined Consistory” West, East and South shall meet at least once a year. Each Consistory shall send two voting delegates to the Combined Consistory meeting. (Additional Consistory members are welcome to attend.) (*Acts of Synod 2013, #33, p.32*)

A. Agenda: The matters to be discussed at these Combined Consistory meetings include:

1. Art. 41 (Consistory) and Art. 44 (Church Visitation) reports. An “Article 41” report is provided by each Consistory in which they describe how in their congregation Consistory meetings are held, church discipline exercised, the poor cared for, and if they need the judgment and help of the Combined Consistory for the proper government of their church.
2. Appeals from church members and from consistories (CO Art. 31);
3. Church discipline matters;
4. Advice regarding ecclesiastical matters;
5. All such matters that promote the unity and wellbeing of the regional churches. The Combined Consistory has no authority to approve and submit overtures to Synod (since that remains a local Consistory responsibility). However churches are permitted to submit draft overtures that they are considering to the Combined Consistory for feedback and input.
6. Topics of mutual edification. Part of the mandate of the Combined Consistory is to provide office bearer training. This training can take place at an office-bearers conference, planned by the convening church of each region, or with East and South alternating in planning a combined office-bearers’ conference.

The matter of office bearer training is a matter of responsibility for the Combined Consistory.

7. (As a matter of clarity, matters regarding access to the pulpit are to be dealt with at a synodical level and are not the jurisdiction of the Combined Consistory.)

B. Procedures:

1. The churches in each region will take turns as calling churches and the Combined Consistory meetings shall be chaired by these same convening churches in their turn. The meeting each year decides where the next meeting will be held.
2. The costs of these Combined Consistory' meetings are to be borne internally by the combined consistories and shall not be submitted to the synodical treasurer.
3. The convening church shall, after each Combined Consistory meeting, prepare a summary report of the meeting, including a brief account of the spiritual condition of each of the churches as reported in the Article 41 and 44 reports, and (upon approval by the attending Consistories) submit this report to the following Synod.

Article 42: Concerning Advisory Members

If a church has more than one minister, then those not delegated according to the foregoing article, shall have the right to attend the Combined Consistory meetings and Synod meetings with advisory vote.

Article 43: Concerning Church Censure

At the close of the Synodical 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 Synod shall authorize 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 Synod is authorized 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 Synod shall judge (See Supplement No. 9). Synod should be mindful in these appointments of the number of vacant churches in each region and where a particular region has a “shortage” of ministers shall assign some Church visitors to attend the Combined Consistory meeting to assist in the giving of advice.

Article 45: Church Archives

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

Article 46: Overtures for Major Assemblies

Overtures concerning matters to be considered in major assemblies shall not be presented until the decision of previous major assemblies touching these matters have been read, in order that what was once decided be considered or not again proposed for discussion, unless a revision be deemed necessary.

Article 47: Correspondence with other Combined Consistory Meetings

Each Combined Consistory Meeting shall be at liberty to solicit and hold correspondence with its neighbouring Combined Consistory Meeting in such manner as they shall judge most conducive to general edification.

Article 48: Synodical Committees

Synod may appoint committees to execute its decisions. All committees shall keep a proper record of their activities and shall

provide a report to each Synod. Committees shall not be discharged from their mandate until Synod itself discharges them. (For further detail, see Supplement C-2).

Article 49: Deputies of Synod

Each Synod shall appoint Deputies to execute everything ordained by Synod pertaining to the respective Combined Consistories 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 Combined Consistories 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 Combined Consistory and the Deputies, this shall be resolved by Synod.

Article 50: Meetings of Synod

The Synod shall meet once every year, unless there are important reasons to meet more often. Each Consistory shall appoint two of its pastors and/or elders to serve as delegates.

- 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). The clerk of the calling church must receive all petitions (protests) at least fourteen days before the announced date of Synod.
- B. When certain matters must be presented to a Combined Consistory or Synod meeting with which one of the elders is especially acquainted, the Consistory does wisely to appoint that elder. It is quite common at our Synod meetings that

alternate delegates are seated for part of Synod. (*Acts of Synod 2009*, Article 25, p.19-20)

- C. A summary report of the Combined Consistory Meeting submitted by the convening church from each region. This report is to include a brief account of the spiritual condition of each congregation and matters of interest to the churches that were considered in the Articles 41 and 44 reports considered by the Combined Consistory meetings. The chairman shall also provide an opportunity for the delegates from each Congregation and Church Visitors to make a brief oral report to the Synod. Pressing church discipline matters and church concerns may also be brought to Synod by way of additional Art. 41 & 44 reports.
- 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. 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.
- F. The costs of the Synod shall be covered by the Synodical Fund.
- G. Synod shall in its meeting make inquiry concerning the offerings for the various church funds.
- H. Counselors: 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 counselor shall also sign the letter of call.
- I. The clerks of Synod shall immediately after the Synod meeting, or as soon as this is possible, inform the consistories of important decisions.

Article 51: Other Churches

The relationship of our churches to other denominations is regulated by Synod. (*Acts of Synod 2010*, Article 40)

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.

A. 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;
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.

B. 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.

C. Complete Correspondence including:

1. 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. 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 creedal or otherwise binding statement.
- D. Other churches whose usages regarding non-essentials differ from ours shall not be rejected.

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 Synod 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 catechizing 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 baptized, 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, authorized by that denomination.

B. Recipients of Baptism:

1. At baptism in special cases the Consistory must be convinced:
 - a. That the child to be baptized 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 baptized, 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 baptized 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 baptized 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.
3. 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 Observance 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 Observance

The churches shall hallow the Lord's Day according to God's Law.

- 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.
- C. The congregations shall also gather for worship on recognized Christian feast days. The Consistories are 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 judgment over each particular case. (*Acts of Synod 2009* Article 25 – 2.1)

Article 68: Catechism Preaching

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

Article 69: Church Singing

In the worship services only the metrical version of the 150 Psalms (450 Psalters, contained in the Psalter published through Reformation Heritage Books, 1999 printing or newer 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. (*Acts of Synod 2011, Article 19*)

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 solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises and prayers. Marriages may be solemnized either in a worship service or in private gatherings of relatives and friends. Ministers shall solemnize only such marriages as are in accordance with the Word of God.
- B. 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?
- C. 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 judgment 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 Combined Consistory — 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: Private Sins and the Rule of Matthew 18

In case anyone 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

Private 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 Un-Repentant

If anyone, 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. (Synod 2009, Article 25-6.1)

Article 75: Public Reconciliation

The reconciliation of those whose sins 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 church(es) 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 Combined Consistory.

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 Combined Consistory.

Article 77: Excommunication

If the sinner has not appealed to the Consistory, the Combined Consistory or the Synod, or the suspension has been upheld by the Consistory, the Combined Consistory 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 Combined Consistory, his name shall be mentioned.

In the **Third**, the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repents) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the Church, so that his excommunication, in case he remains obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the Church. (*Acts of Synod 2009*, Article 25-6.1)

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. (see also *Acts of Synod 2009*, Art.25, p.20-21)

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*, Art. 26-3a, and 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 baptized 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 baptized 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 **re-baptized**, 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 Combined Consistory or 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 Combined Consistory meeting or 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 judgment 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.

The restoration to 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 baptized 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. However, 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 Combined Consistory or Synod together form bodies which have sufficient legal authority over the affairs which they share as Combined Consistory and Synod respectively. These bodies are legally represented in and out of court by these respective 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.

Article 86: 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.
