

Church Order

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



2015 Edition

**Including Supplements
Section B:
For Broader Assemblies**



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

Free Reformed Churches of North America

Church Order Supplements **Section B: Supplements for Broader** **Assemblies**

Contents:

- B-1. Public Declaration of Agreement with Three Forms of Unity
- B-2. Regulations for Church Visitation (C.O. Art.44)
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NOTE: A companion volume contains Church Order Supplements:

A: Supplements for Consistories

C: Supplements for Standing Committees

Supplement No.**B-1: Public Declaration of Agreement**

WITH THE THREE FORMS OF UNITY

(cf. Church Order Article 41, 47 & 50)

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 No.**B-2: Regulations for Church Visitation**

(cf. Church Order Article 44)

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:

A. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

1. The Synod shall annually appoint two ministers with the mandate to investigate the condition of the congregations, guided by these Regulations for Church Visitation, and report to the meeting of the Combined Consistory of its region.
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

B. 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?

C. Questions to be asked of 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?

D. Questions to be asked of 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?

E. Questions to be asked of 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.

F. CONCLUSIONS:

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 Combined Consistory meeting.
2. Following this, verification is made whether the books are regularly audited and then signed by the Consistory or a 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.
4. The church visitors shall make a report of their findings and decisions to be read at the next Combined Consistory meeting.

Supplement No.**B-3: Guidelines for the Procedure of Synod Meetings**

(cf. Church Order Article 30ff)

I. Overview of Synod Meetings¹⁶**A. 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. While the documentation of procedures is necessary so that “all things be done decently and in order” (1 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

¹⁶ The Guidelines for Synod Meetings also contains relevant principles and procedures which will be helpful – even advisable – for the regulation of other broader assemblies, like the Combined Consistory meetings. However, each Combined Consistory meeting is free to glean and apply these as relevant at their own discretion so as to ensure that their meetings are conducted in an orderly manner.

have been established over time (primarily adapted from Martin Monsma's Church Order Commentary).

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

B. 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 them, 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.

C. Convening Church and Agenda Establishment

At each synod, a Convening Church is designated with the task of making arrangements for the next synod. The Convening Church's task is:

to announce the date and location of the Synod at least three months before the date of the meeting, as well as the deadline (of no later than six weeks prior to the Synodical meeting) and the name and address of the contact person for the submission of agenda items.

to draft an agenda for the synodical meeting. The agenda ordinarily shall include reports from synodically appointed committees, overtures or communications of individuals or consistories, and appeals. At each Synod, a report is received from each combined consistory and the Article 49 deputies. An opportunity is given for each congregation to report joys or concerns with Synod or to seek the advice of Synod. If required, Church Visitors also have the opportunity to report on their work.

to assemble the submitted items, and distribute all of the relevant materials with the agenda to the churches. Personal appeals and letters are to be noted in the agenda but not distributed. 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.

to report to synod any issues or decisions made concerning the agenda when the agenda is to be adopted.

to review the previous years' Acts of Synod and bring to the attention of Synod any "Matters Arising" which have not been followed through or reported on in the various reports that have been submitted for the agenda.

to submit to the clerks of synod a copy of all submissions for archiving and to send an electronic version of submissions for incorporation in the Acts of Synod.

D. 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.

E. 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 that the Chairman of the previous year's Synod 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 and 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.

F. 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 II.

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.

G. Committee Reports and Conduct at Synod¹⁷

Church Order Article 48 implies that 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, the committees do not carry the authority of synod. The specific matter in dispute needs to be brought back to the Synod for resolution.

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 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.

An important matter to understand is the committee's authority and its relationship to Synod.

Four elements belong to decision-making in any institution: the legislative part (the establishment of basic policy); the executive

¹⁷ See Acts of Synod 2009, Article 25 and "Guidelines for the proper submission of reports to synod" (pp. 145-148).

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.) 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.

To guard against going beyond their “execution” role by proposing matters, “selling” their own recommendations, or forming a “committee caucus model” at synod meetings, committees should keep the following guidelines in mind.

- Committees should clearly 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. It is mistaken to think 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. Synodical Delegates are present at a deliberative assembly as office-bearers sent by their church. 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, these recommendations involve straightforward “execution” matters. 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 48 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 the right (even the responsibility) to draft and submit minority report when substantive differences arise. In such a case, the committee report will state that after a thorough discussion of the issues, the committee could not come to a consensus on the matter and therefore is submitting both a majority and minority report regarding the matter.
- At times the executive of a committee is considered to have the authority to make decisions on behalf of the committee on the floor of synod. Committee reports to synod should have the signoff of the entire committee and not just the executive. Executives are to serve the committees by shaping and preparing agendas and facilitating the conduct of the committees' business, not to serve as an alternative decision-making structure.

H. 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. Each session is to be opened and closed with prayer. At the first session of each day, a roll call is conducted immediately following opening devotions.

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.

Ideally, the same delegates will attend an entire Synod meeting in order to facilitate the continuity of discussion on topics carried over various sessions. In practice, since some brothers are not able to attend the entire meeting, alternate delegates are seated

for some of the sessions. Synod has also recognized that when certain matters are presented to Synod with which one of the elders is especially acquainted, the consistory is wise to appoint that elder, even if it is only for that agenda item¹⁸

I. 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 combined consistory and congregational reports. Synod is not to exercise the right to go into Executive Session unless necessary.

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

K. Discussion

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.

¹⁸ Synod 2009, Article 25

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.

L. Motions

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.

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.

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. 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.

M. Pre-Advice Committees

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 their 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.

N. Voting

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. If a vote is tied, the motion is not carried.

O. 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 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.

P. 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.

II. 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, 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). For more guidance on the functioning of committees in relation to synod see I.G. above.

Correspondence - Only correspondence from individuals that have been carried as far as possible in minor assemblies shall be considered for Synod's consideration. If a communication has failed to gain the endorsement of a combined consistory or consistory, it may be submitted by the consistory or individual for Synodical consideration. If an individual has been unable first to present the matter to the consistory 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.

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.

Overture - 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 to 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.

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 Advisors 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.

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:

- The Chairman shall either himself or through another person whom he assigns, welcome all guests of Synod and respond to all greetings received;
- 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.
- 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.

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, the First Clerk 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, the Second Clerk is responsible for them and has them completed in his name.

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 as only as advisory and with the consent of the body.

C. 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.

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.C, I.E).

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 Authorized Version of the 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 printer with an adequate supply of paper for the use of the Assistant Clerk; 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 three Clerks (who supply their own computers)
- 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.

Seating Plan for Synod Meetings

