

CHURCH ORDER
OF THE
FREE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF
NORTH AMERICA

PREFACE

With the publishing of this volume we are pleased to present to you the Church Order of the Free Reformed Church of North America

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

Amongst those who did work on it and who are no longer with us, we would call special attention to the names of Rev. C. Noordegraaf, Rev. J. Tamminga and Elder Frank Vanden Bout (of Grand Rapids) who have joined that part of the Church where no Church Order is required, for they may see Him face to face. And a word of thanks is due to Rev. L.W. Bilkes who, together with these men, did so much to produce the first draft in English. It was particularly Rev. P. Vander Meyden who was instrumental in providing the final draft and finishing touches. 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 final lay-out and printing

The Apostle Paul said "let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40) and he referred specifically to proper conduct in the churches. Any church order is a man made product and, for that very reason, fallible and subject to alterations. The very format of this issue is a mute testimony to that fact. Nevertheless, we believe that the principles expressed in this volume are derived from the Scriptures. Not all articles are of equal importance: some are directly derived from the teaching of the Word, some are derived by implication while yet others are the expression of sanctified common sense. For the sake of good order in the churches, all ought to be observed. As always, these rules are to be observed and implemented with discretion. A blind adherence to any formulation of principles, no matter how good, can only lead to a form of stifling legalism. A disregard for decency and good order in the Church of Jesus Christ can only lead to chaos.

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

For the Publications Committee,
C.A. Schouls,
Vineland, ON
March 1985

As we republish the church order in 2001, it is evident that a totally new version was required. Since the first printing in 1985, several loose-leaf additions were added, lastly in 1991. The Publications Committee is now presenting a total reprint of the Church Order proper. Although this paper edition will be useful in meetings, as a portable up-to-date tool, the Publications Committee also makes the church order available on CD ROM. This has as advantage that all forms can be customised for use, and data/names can be inserted as needed, for various ecclesiastical matters.

If we were to include in this reprint all the supplements, mandates and regulations developed since the issue of the Church Order of 1985, we would have a publication more than double the size of that earlier version.

This is indicative of a church growing out of the infancy of informalism, into the structure of streamlining and better organisation. Good regulation is a benefit, but over regulation can become a hindrance. It is partly for that reason that many of the additions will be presented as a "supplement". (Supplements and Appendices will be published as they are finalised.) Churches need "supplemental" assistance, but not excessively legislated procedure. This would be contrary to Reformed church polity, where the consistory is the ruling body in the church. We trust that this new edition will be useful, that is, receive a very "full use".

The edition now at hand is basically the same as that of 1985. Some corrections have been made: some typographical errors have been removed but, no doubt, others have crept in. An attempt has been made to improve syntax and sentence structure and, in general, “to clean up” the previous version. The degree of success in all this remains yet to be confirmed.

One final note – this is the Church Order of the Free Reformed Churches while the previous version was entitled “Church Order of the Free Reformed Church”. The correction in the name was made some years ago and reflects the awareness that each church is a full manifestation of the Body of Christ. May this Church Order assist each church to live as such.

This original draft revision was prepared by Mr. C. A. Van Doodewaard in January 2000. The delay in presenting it is none of his doing.

For the Publications Committee
C. A. Schouls,
Chatham, ON
April 2001

Copies may be obtained at \$ 8.00 each through the Publications Committee

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CHURCH ORDER
of the
FREE REFORMED CHURCHES
OF NORTH AMERICA
(Based on the Church Order of Dordrecht 1618 and 1619)

PREAMBLE

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

Article 1

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 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 they who have been officially called and ordained or installed shall hold and exercise office in the church.

WHO MAY NOT OFFICIATE AS MINISTER OF THE WORD

Article 3

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

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

B. No one may be permitted to speak an edifying word in the congregations of the Classis to which he belongs without first being presented by his consistory to the Classis and that after that the Classis has examined 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 such a person is given approval to labour in this particular Classis.

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 Classis, 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.

ADMISSION TO THE OFFICE OF MINISTER OF THE WORD

Article 4

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 *CALLING* by the Consistory, after preceding prayers and after voting by the congregation with due observance of the regulations established by the Consistory for this purpose and, furthermore, with the advice of the counsellor appointed for this purpose by the Classis. A Consistory may not call a candidate to the Ministry of the Word before the Synod has officially announced his candidacy.

Secondly, the *EXAMINATION*, both of doctrine and life, which shall be conducted by the Synod.

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.

CALLING OF MINISTERS TO ANOTHER CONGREGATION

Article 5

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

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

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

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

C. "**CLASSIS CONTRACTA**":

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

D. As a brief ministry in a congregation is usually contrary to its best interest, Consistories are advised not to call ministers who have not laboured three years in their congregations, and the ministers are admonished not to leave their congregations that soon unless urgently required.

A minister who came to his present congregation from the Netherlands should not be called during the first three years of his pastorate (see Acts of Synod 1963). (Concept-rules for the election and calling of ministers of the Word: see Supplement No. 1; concept calling-letter: see Supplement No. 2,)

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

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

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

1. The Consistory and the two Consistories mentioned in Article 5, sub. C, as Classis Contracta, shall determine as soon as possible the date upon which the particular minister shall terminate his services; usually this date shall not be later than six weeks after the acceptance of the call.
2. The particular minister is allowed to officiate in our churches until the date established according to paragraph '1'.
3. The Consistory is required to pay the particular minister his salary and provide him with housing to the date set according to '1'. After this date, however, the Consistory is discharged of its obligations as outlined in the call letter or any subsequent agreement made during his ministry in that church.
4. The Consistory shall, with the advice of the counsellor, give to the minister an official release. (Supplement No.15)

G. Calling ministers from other denominations:

1. A consistory, considering to call a minister from a denomination in a foreign country, shall first ask for the advice of the synodical deputies for External Relations. Before they give their advice, these deputies shall make thorough inquiry 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 not be able to abide by the negative advice, it ought to present this case before the Classis.
2. In case the minister, who is being considered for call, does not belong to a denomination with which we have a correspondence relationship, the Consistory must inform the deputies of the reasons for considering such a minister and that the needs of the local church justify his nomination.
3. With respect to the calling of ministers belonging to a denomination with which we have no correspondence relationship, deputies cannot make a final decision. They must report to the Classis to which the church, which desires to call, belongs and this Classis must decide whether or not the minister may be called. In case of conflict between deputies and that particular Classis, Synod must give the final verdict. With respect to calling ministers belonging to a denomination with which we do have a correspondence relationship, deputies may make a decision. (see further under 1.).

4. When the minister has accepted the call to the congregation, he shall not be admitted to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments nor be installed in the congregation which has called him until he has subjected himself, with favourable result, to a colloquium doctum with regard to doctrine and knowledge at Classis. Before such a colloquium doctum 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. A candidate is to show that he has successfully completed the required studies at a seminary or university in preparation for the ministry, as well as good testimonies concerning his confession and walk of life. At a colloquium doctum, Classis requires a level of knowledge similar to that which is required at a regular peremptory examination in the Free Reformed Churches.

When it concerns a minister who has previously been a minister in the Free Reformed Churches, the same rules shall be observed, with the understanding that the colloquium doctum shall consist of an examination as to whether this minister, as far as doctrine is concerned, agrees with the doctrine of the Free Reformed Churches.

At every colloquium doctum, Classis shall be assisted by deputies for External Relations.

H. When a minister of our churches accepts a call to a church in a foreign country with which our churches are in correspondence relationship, the following rules shall apply:

1. The Consistory shall as soon as possible determine the date upon which the minister shall terminate his service. This date is the same date on which the minister shall officially preach his farewell sermon.
2. The Consistory is obligated to pay the stipulated salary to the minister and provide him with housing up to the date set according to '1'. After this date the Consistory is discharged of any obligations undertaken in the call letter or during the tenure of the minister. This implies that a minister has no claim to any emeritus funds whatsoever, nor his widow 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 in Canada or the U.S.A. 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 Classis.
- c. He must present good testimonies with regard to his confession and walk of life, if possible from his own denomination.
- d. After this, Classis shall closely examine him with regard to the motives for his request, as also his relationship to the Lord and his calling to the office of minister.
- e. Classis shall examine him as to his convictions regarding the doctrines of his church with which the Free Reformed Churches possibly disagree.
- f. When Classis' judgement is favourable, it shall, with the assistance of the deputies of External Relations, conduct a colloquium doctum, that is, when it concerns ministers who have successfully completed their studies at a theological seminary or university in preparation for the ministry. When it concerns candidates, they shall present their degrees, and they shall be examined in the subjects mentioned in Article 4.
- g. Upon favourable result, Classis shall make him eligible for call in the Free Reformed Churches.
- h. At the meeting of Classis, he shall sign the Form of Subscription for ministers of the Word. (Supplement No.10)

2. When a minister who has not pursued a course of study at a theological seminary or university in preparation for the ministry, desires to be admitted to the office of minister in the Free Reformed Church, 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 Classis.

- c. He must present a good attestation regarding his confession and walk of life, if possible, from his own denomination.
- d. Classis makes inquiries as to the manner in which he has been ordained to the ministry.
- e. Classis closely examines him with regard to the motives for his request, as also to his calling and his relationship to the Lord.
- f. Upon favourable result, Classis, with the assistance of deputies of External Relations, shall examine him by having him deliver a short sermon on a text selected by Classis, in order to ascertain whether or not he has exceptional gifts.
- g. If the preliminary judgement of Classis is favourable, it will conduct a peremptory examination of the particular person with regard to his general knowledge, orthodoxy, and his basic knowledge of practical homiletics and pastoral work in the congregation.
- h. Upon favourable results, Classis shall designate several congregations where he shall, under the supervision of the pastors and consistories of these congregations, preach for a period of 3 months. The consistories of these congregations shall report on his preaching to Classis.
- i. After receiving favourable reports from the consistories, Classis shall proceed to examine him according to Article 8, sub B-9, and upon favourable results shall declare him eligible for call.
- j. If, along with this minister, either the entire or part of the congregation (which he served) also joins the Free Reformed Churches, and his labours are required there, the following rules are to be observed:
 - After the rules mentioned in a - g have been observed with favourable results, Classis may permit him to speak a word of exhortation in his congregation and continue his work there, as he did before:
 - This permission terminates each time after a period of no more than six months.
 - During the same time the procedure mentioned in h - i is to be carried out.
- k. After he has been declared eligible for call he shall subscribe to the Form of Subscription for ministers of the Word.

J. Visiting Ministers:

- 1. A visiting minister from a church in a foreign country with which the Free Reformed Churches have no correspondence relationship may not preach (or occupy the pulpit) in a Free Reformed Church during his visit in Canada and the U.S.A. Exceptions to this rule may only be made with the approval of Synod.
- 2. A visiting minister from a church in a foreign country with which the Free Reformed Churches do have a corresponding relationship, may only preach in a Free Reformed Church if he has received permission according to the following rules:
 - a. He sends a request to preach (or occupy the pulpit) in the Free Reformed Churches to Deputies of External Relations.
 - b. These Deputies make a decision as soon as possible.
 - c. Upon favourable decision Deputies shall make a formal announcement concerning this in the official magazine of the Free Reformed Churches.
 - d. Deputies of External Relations at all times have the right to withdraw the permission but shall do so (unless there are exceptional circumstances) only after a meeting with the minister concerned.
 - e. The granted permission automatically terminates when the minister concerned has accepted a call to a church from another denomination in Canada or the U.S.A.

CALLING TO SPECIAL WORK

Article 6

No minister of the Word shall be permitted to accept an extraordinary ministerial position such as military chaplain or chaplain in institutions of mercy except with the consent of his consistory and Classis.

Classis shall decide whether this extraordinary ministerial position is spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling. The relationship which will exist between this minister and the congregation concerned shall be arranged with the approval of its Classis.

PARTICULAR CONGREGATION

Article 7

No one shall be called to the ministry of the Word, without his being connected to a particular congregation.

MINISTERS WITHOUT THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

Article 8

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

These regulations are the following:

A. No one may be examined according to Article 8 who has studied at a theological school or seminary.

B. The following regulations are to be followed in examinations according to Article 8 :

1. The person, aspiring to the ministerial office, shall contact his Consistory to secure the credentials from it concerning the required qualifications as stated in Article 8.

2. To this end, the Consistory shall begin by inquiring as to his relationship to the Lord, his calling, exceptional gifts, and walk of life. Following this, the Consistory shall decide whether to recommend the particular person to the Classis.

3. In the event of a favourable decision, the person is recommended to the Classis by means of a full written report.

4. The Classis shall, in considering the report of the Consistory, tentatively examine him as to purity of confession, relationship to the Lord, calling to office, exceptional gifts and general education.

5. Upon a favourable result, the Classis shall recommend the particular person to the Synod by sending it a written report and with it a copy of the report of the Consistory as mentioned under '3'.

6. The Synod shall first examine the written credentials from the Consistory and the Classis concerning the requirements mentioned in Article 8, then also examine the person by having him deliver a short sermon on a text selected by the Synod, in order to ascertain whether or not the required qualifications are indeed present.

7. If the preliminary judgement of the Synod is favourable it will conduct a peremptory examination of the particular person. The Synod shall give him some time that he may prepare himself for this examination.

8. The Synod shall designate several congregations where he shall, under the supervision of the pastors of these congregations, preach a sermon in each case on a different text. The Consistories of these congregations shall make a report hereof to the Synod.

After receiving favourable reports from these Consistories the Synod can proceed to the examination.

9. The examination shall cover the following subjects:

a. Practical explanation of Holy Scriptures, for which purpose he is given a chapter in the Old and one in the New Testament four weeks prior to the examination.

b. Dogmatics and Apologetics

c. Ethics

d. Symbolics

e. Bible History

f. Church History

g. Homiletics

h. Poimenics (Pastoral care)

- i. Liturgics
- j. Catechetics
- k. Church Polity

l. He shall also improvise on a text, designated to him one hour before.

m. He shall also submit a written sermon on a text that has been given him two weeks prior to the meeting.

10. The person being examined must have been a confessing member of one of our churches for two years and must have attained the age of thirty years before he can be admitted to this examination.

11. If he has filled the requirements and the Synod has made an affirmative decision concerning him, he is then made a candidate for the Ministry of the Word in our churches.

Article 9

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.

ACCEPTING A CALL ELSEWHERE

Article 10

A minister, once lawfully called, may not leave the congregation with which he is connected to accept a call elsewhere without the consent of the Consistory and knowledge on the part of the Classis; likewise, no other church may receive him until he has presented a proper certificate of dismissal from the church and the Classis where he served. (See Concept-credentials for Departing Ministers, Supplement No. 3)

SUPPORT OF MINISTERS

Article 11

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

A. The Consistory shall provide for the proper support of the minister and his family, also in case of illness, in such a way that they have no financial worries.

B. When the disciplinary action of suspension is deserved, then dismissal from office may not take place.

C. The financial obligations of the congregation towards its dismissed minister must be regulated by the Consistory and the Classis. The Synod shall nominate Deputies who shall have charge of the funds for assisting needy congregations. (See Supplement No.4)

CHANGE TO ANOTHER STATE OF LIFE

Article 12

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

EMERITATION

Article 13

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

A. REQUEST FOR EMERITATION:

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

B. EMERITATION PROCEDURE:

When a minister is declared emeritus, the following rules are to be applied:

1. Classis (Synod) shall seriously try to maintain the principle of Article 13, according to which principle Classis shall grant retirement only to ministers of the Word who because of old age, illness, or other reasons, have become incapable of performing the duties of their office.
2. In retirement applications the declarations of medical doctors are to be considered decisive. With regard to this, Classis has the right to request the applying minister of the Word to submit himself to a medical examination by one or more medical doctors as appointed by Classis (Synod).
3. In dubious cases, as, for example, when a minister's request for retirement is obviously the result (either completely or partly) of the poor relationship between the applying minister on the one hand and his Consistory (Congregation) on the other hand, or at least related to this, Classis (Synod) is seriously to consider whether or not a satisfying solution other than that of retirement declaration can be found.
4. In connection with this it is inadvisable that Classis (Synod) grant temporary retirement, since it conflicts with the principle of Article 13.
5. Synodical Deputies in charge of the Retirement Fund, upon receiving the application from the Consistory concerned, are obliged to grant support to that church, in accordance with the existing stipulations. (See Fall Classis 1956)

C. EMERITATION PRIVILEGES:

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

ABSENCE FROM OFFICE

Article 14

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

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

PREACHING ELSEWHERE

Article 15

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

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

THE TASK OF MINISTERS OF THE WORD

Article 16

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.

EQUALITY

Article 17

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

THE TASK OF PROFESSORS OF THEOLOGY

Article 18

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

TRAINING FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Article 19

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. 6)

THEOLOGICAL TRAINING

Article 20

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.

EVANGELIZATION AND FOREIGN MISSIONS

Article 21

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.

ELECTION OF ELDERS

Article 22

The elders are chosen out of a nomination 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 of which as many are chosen as needed, and those chosen after they have been approved, 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. (See Supplement No. 7)

DUTIES OF ELDERS

Article 23

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.

ELECTION OF DEACONS

Article 24

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

DUTIES OF DEACONS

Article 25

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 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.

TERM OF OFFICE OF ELDERS AND DEACONS

Article 27

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 re-election advisable.

RELATION TO AUTHORITIES

Article 28

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 THE ECCLESIASTICAL ASSEMBLIES

Article 29

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

OTHER ASSEMBLIES:

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

Article 30

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.

RIGHT OF APPEAL

Article 31

If any one complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the Articles of the Church Order, confirmed by this Synod, as long as they are not changed by another Synod.

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

PROCEEDINGS

Article 32

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

CREDENTIALS

Article 33

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.

PRESIDENT

Article 34

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.

SECRETARY / CLERK

Article 35

In all assemblies there shall be not only a president, but also a clerk to keep a faithful record of that which deserves to be recorded.

AUTHORITY

Article 36

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

CONSISTORY

Article 37

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. 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

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

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

Article 39

In places where as yet no Consistory can be constituted and members live, the Classis shall place these under the supervision of a neighbouring Consistory.

DEACON MEETINGS

Article 40

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.

CLASSIS

Article 41

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

The Classis meets at least twice per year, if possible, at a time and place determined by the previous classical meeting. In these meetings the ministers shall preside in rotation, or one shall be chosen to preside; however the same minister shall not be chosen twice in succession. Furthermore, the president shall, among other things, ask each of the delegates if in his church the Consistory-meetings are held, if church discipline is exercised, if the poor are cared for, and lastly if they need the judgement and help of the Classis for the proper government of their church.

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

ADVISORY MEMBERS

Article 42

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

CENSURE

Article 43

At the close of the Classical and other major assemblies, censure shall be exercised over those who in the meeting have done something worthy of punishment, or who have scorned the admonition of the minor assemblies.

CHURCH VISITORS

Article 44

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

ARCHIVES

Article 45

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

INSTRUCTIONS

Article 46

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

[PARTICULAR SYNOD

Article 47

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

CORRESPONDENCE

Article 48

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

DEPUTIES OF PARTICULAR SYNOD

Article 49

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

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

SYNOD

Article 50

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

A. All items for the agenda are to be submitted to the clerk of the calling church no later than six weeks before the announced date of Synod. The agenda shall list all matters to be dealt with by the Synod except petitions (protests). The clerk of the calling church must receive all petitions (protests) at least fourteen days before the announced date of Synod.

B. As a rule all communications addressed to the Synod shall be read in its meetings, unless the officers of Synod advise otherwise.

C. Synod has the right to meet in Executive Session, however, it shall not make use of this right more than necessary. The matters which at the Synod have been handled in Executive Session may be reported in a meeting of the Classis provided this Classis is also meeting in Executive Session at that time.

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.

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

E. Synod shall in its meeting make inquiry concerning the collections for the various church funds.

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

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

FOREIGN CHURCHES

Article 51

The relationship of our churches in North America to the Churches in foreign lands is regulated by Synod.

Our Churches, in order to manifest the unity of the Church of Jesus Christ, seek contact with other Reformed Churches, which to the best of our knowledge, are Churches that maintain an unreserved commitment to and agreement with (1) the infallibility and inerrancy of Scriptures as the Word of God and (2) the validity and relevance of our Confessions. In order to facilitate this process our Churches have adopted three levels of ecclesiastical fellowship. With regard to level "A", it is our understanding that establishing level "A" of ecclesiastical fellowship with another federation in no way "makes binding" or "expected" or "necessary" moving towards the other two levels. In other words, establishing a "limited contact" form of fellowship does not necessarily require moving towards the next level of contact, while it does open the door for such development under God's blessing. Level "A" ought primarily to function as an exploratory, communicatory level in an official and brotherly manner.

A. Limited Contact including:

1. the attendance of each other's Synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
2. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*;
3. 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);
4. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example:
offering material support and co-operation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.

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 attendance of each other's Synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
4. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*;
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. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and co-operation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.

C. Complete Correspondence including:

1. the mutual acceptance of each other's (membership) attestations.
2. opening the Lord's Table to each other;
3. opening the pulpit to each other's visiting ministers.
4. mutually considering each other's ministers eligible for call;
5. mutual consultation with each other regarding significant actions such as, for example, the revision of the confession or of the Church Order, the extension or reduction of a relationship of correspondence, etc.;
6. the attendance of each other's synods; visiting delegates attending our Synod may be asked for advice;
7. sending each other copies of the *Acts of Synod*
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);
9. co-operative activity in areas of common responsibility, for example: offering material support and cooperation or consultation with regard to mission work, theological training, and such like.

OF THE DOCTRINE

SIGNING OF THE FORM OF SUBSCRIPTION BY MINISTERS

Article 52

The ministers of the Word shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity, by signing the stated Form of Subscription for ministers and office-bearers. The ministers of the Word who refuse to do so shall de facto be suspended from their office by the Consistory or Classis until they, after conferring together, are willing to sign it. If they persist in refusing they shall be deposed from their office.

The ministers of the Word shall by signing the Form of Subscription, solemnly as in the presence of God, agree and bind themselves to the doctrine, service, and discipline of the Free Reformed Churches of North America.

The signing by candidates to the ministry of the Word shall take place after passing 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.

SIGNING BY ELDERS AND DEACONS

Article 53

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.

EDUCATION

Article 54

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.

PERVERSE LITERATURE AND WORLDLY AMUSEMENTS

Article 55

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

OF THE SACRAMENTS AND OTHER CEREMONIES

HOLY BAPTISM

Article 56

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

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

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

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

B. RECIPIENTS OF BAPTISM:

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

C. NON-ELIGIBLE PARENTS:

1. In the event one of the parents of the child to be baptised is not a member of the congregation, then the answering of the baptismal questions shall not be required of him or her.
2. One who is under censure may not answer to the questions in the Form for Baptism.

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

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Article 61

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

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 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.

WORSHIP SERVICES

Article 64

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.

FUNERALS

Article 65

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

PRAYER DAYS

Article 66

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.

LORD'S DAY OBSERVANCE

Article 67

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

- A.** The churches are urged faithfully to keep the Lord's Day holy so that with the exception of works of mercy, charity and necessity, weekly labours and trade shall cease, that the wrath of God be not greatly kindled against His congregation on account of the desecration of the Day of Rest.
- B.** Those who perform unnecessary labour on the Lord's Day may not be members of the congregation. The consistory shall exercise its judgement over each particular case.

CATECHISM PREACHING

Article 68

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

CHURCH SINGING

Article 69

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

MARRIAGE STIPULATIONS

Article 70

Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care to marry in the Lord.

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

B. Ministers shall not solemnise marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God.

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

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

D. Divorce and Remarriage

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. If divorce takes place on grounds which the church judges to be un-Scriptural, 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 un-Scriptural 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 re-married.

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 re-instated as members in good standing after they show repentance for their sin, also by a godly walk of life and after confessing their guilt.

10. Concerning those to whom sub 7 and/or 8 apply: If they had withdrawn their membership while church discipline was being exercised and again ask to be admitted to the communion of the church, or if they

desire to be admitted to the communion of the church for the first time, such request cannot be granted until they have confessed their guilt and after a sufficiently long period of probation -- which the consistory must set, upon the advice of the classis -- they show sincere repentance, also by a godly walk of life.

OF DISCIPLINE AND ECCLESIASTICAL ADMONITIONS

CENSURE OF MEMBERS

Article 71

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

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

Article 73

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

Article 74

If any one, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public sin, the matter shall be reported to the consistory. (Matthew 18:17).

Article 75

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

Article 76

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

EXCOMMUNICATION

Article 77

After the suspension from the Lord's Table, and subsequent admonitions, and 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 admonition, and the congregation shall be exhorted to speak to him and to pray for him.

There shall be three such admonitions. In the first the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned. In the second, with the consent of the Classis, his name shall be mentioned. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repent) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the church, so that his excommunication, in case he remains obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the church. The interval between the admonitions shall be left to the discretion of the Consistory.

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

1. Preference must be given to the above stipulation, namely, to deal with delinquent members according to the procedure of ecclesiastical discipline.

2. However, acknowledging a passive resignation does not conflict with the nature and character of the church. (see Acts of Synod 1981, C.O. report)

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

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

1. When baptised members, who have arrived at the years of discretion, because of indifference regularly withdraw themselves from the worship services in their own denomination, the Consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them, and when they continue to be indifferent and disobedient, exclude them from the church.

2. Members by baptism who have been excluded from the church, and who later repent of their sin, shall be received again into the church, after a period of probation, followed by public confession of guilt and confession of faith.

3. When baptised members, who have arrived at the years of discretion, regularly stay away from the worship services in their own denomination because they attend church elsewhere, the Consistory shall repeatedly and patiently admonish them. When they continue to be disobedient, the Consistory shall deal with them as may be required in accordance with the Church Order.

D. Members of the church who have themselves re-baptised, actually withdraw themselves from the communion of the church, although this fact is not always to be regarded as a breaking with the church. It is the task of the consistory to apply ecclesiastical admonition and discipline for a period of three months, because the act of so-called re-baptism is completely in conflict with God's Word and with the confession and Order of the church. If during these three months they refuse to repent of their sin the consistory shall consider them as having withdrawn themselves from the communion of the church. Discipline will be discontinued upon a sincere confession of guilt and a recanting of the errors which are connected with re-baptism.

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

READMISSION

Article 78

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 re-instated, according to the form adopted for that purpose on the basis of the Word of God.

DISCIPLINE OF OFFICE-BEARERS

Article 79

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

Article 80

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

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

MUTUAL CENSURE

Article 81

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

CERTIFICATE OF MEMBERSHIP

Article 82

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

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

1. Members who leave a congregation should be prompt in requesting their certificate of membership from the Consistory and an announcement to the congregation shall follow this request. (See Supplement No. 16)
2. The Consistory which has given this certificate, should as soon as possible inform the Consistory to which this person plans to go of this matter, so they can exercise the usual supervision.
3. The departing member is obliged to bring this certificate immediately to the Consistory of the church to which he is moving.
4. When a baptised member moves to another congregation, a certificate of baptismal membership will be forwarded to the consistory of that church. (see Supplement No.17)

5. Certificates are not given to other church denominations.
6. A record of membership may be issued upon request.

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

NEEDY

Article 83

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.

LEGAL SECURITY

Article 84

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

Article 85

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.

FOREIGN CHURCHES

Article 86

Foreign churches whose usages regarding non-essentials differ from ours shall not be rejected.

REVISION

Article 87

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