

# **CHURCH ORDER**



**CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

**1978 EDITION**

**CHURCH ORDER OF  
THE CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH  
IN NORTH AMERICA**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Article 1**

a. The Christian Reformed Church, confessing its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of his church, and desiring to honor the apostolic injunction that in the churches all things are to be done decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40), regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities in the following articles.

b. The main subjects treated in this Church Order are: The Offices of the Church, The Assemblies of the Church, The Task and Activities of the Church, and the Admonition and Discipline of the Church.

**I. THE OFFICES OF THE CHURCH**

**A. GENERAL PROVISIONS**

**Article 2**

The offices instituted by Christ in his church are those of the minister of the Word, the elder, and the deacon. These offices differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor.

**Article 3**

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



**Article 4**

a. In calling to an office, the consistory shall present to the congregation a nomination of at least twice the number to be elected. In special circumstances the consistory may submit a nomination which totals less than twice the number to be elected, giving reasons for this departure from the rule.

b. Prior to making nominations the consistory may give the congregation an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons.

c. The election by the congregation shall take place under the supervision of the consistory after prayer and in accordance with the regulations established by the consistory. The right to vote shall be limited to confessing members in good standing.

d. After having called the elected persons to their respective offices and having announced their names, the consistory shall proceed to ordain or install them if no valid impediment has arisen. The ordination or installation shall take place in the public worship services with the use of the prescribed ecclesiastical forms.

**Article 5**

All office-bearers, on occasions stipulated by consistorial, classical, and synodical regulations, shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Form of Subscription.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 5

**B. THE MINISTERS OF THE WORD****Article 6**

a. The completion of a satisfactory theological training shall be required for admission to the ministry of the Word.

b. Graduates of the theological seminary of the Christian Reformed Church who have been declared candidates for the ministry of the Word by the churches shall be eligible for call.

c. Those who have been trained elsewhere shall not be eligible for call unless they have met the requirements stipulated in the synodical regulations and have been declared by the churches to be candidates for the ministry of the Word.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 6

**Article 7**

a. Those who have not received the prescribed theological training but who give evidence that they are singularly gifted as to godliness, humility, spiritual discretion, wisdom, and the native ability to preach the Word, may, by way of exception, be admitted to the ministry of the Word, especially when the need is urgent.

b. The classis, in the presence of the synodical deputies, shall examine these men concerning the required exceptional gifts. With the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, classis shall proceed as circumstances may warrant and in accordance with synodical regulations.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 7

**Article 8**

a. Ministers of the Christian Reformed Church are eligible for call, with due observance of the relevant rules.

b. Ministers of other denominations desiring to become ministers in the Christian Reformed Church shall be declared eligible for a call by a classis only after a thorough examination of their theological training, ministerial record, knowledge of and soundness in the Reformed faith and their exemplariness of life. The presence and concurring advice of the synodical deputies are required.

c. Ministers of other denominations who have not been declared eligible for a call shall not be called unless all synodical requirements have been met.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 8

**Article 9**

In nominating and calling a minister the consistory shall seek the approval of the counselor who acts in behalf of classis to see that the ecclesiastical regulations have been observed. The consistory and counselor shall sign the letter of call and the counselor shall render an account of his labors to classis.

**Article 10**

a. The ordination of a candidate for the ministry of the Word requires the approval of the classis of the calling church and of the synodical deputies. The classis, in the presence of the deputies, shall examine him concerning his doctrine and life in accordance with synodical regulations. The ordination shall be accompanied by the laying on of hands by the officiating minister.

b. The installation of a minister shall require the approval of the classis of the calling church or its interim committee, to which the minister shall have previously presented good ecclesiastical testimonials of doctrine and life which have been given him by his former consistory and classis.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 10

**Article 11**

a. The task of the minister is to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship services, and catechize the youth in order that the church may be built and unbelievers won for Christ. Although all ministers share this common task, each shall discharge it in accordance with his particular calling, whether he is a minister in a local congregation or a missionary at home or abroad.

b. The minister, with the elders, shall have supervision over the congregation and his fellow office-bearers, exercising admonition and discipline and seeing to it that everything is done decently and in order. He shall, with the elders, exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism.

**Article 12**

A minister who enters upon the work of home or foreign missions shall be called in the regular manner by a local church, which acts in cooperation with the appropriate committees of classis or synod. Although the duties of a missionary may be regulated through such cooperation, the supervision of his doctrine and life rests with the calling church.

**Article 13**

a. A minister who is charged with an extraordinary ministerial task shall remain subject to the calling church, which shall supervise his doctrine and life. His duties, however, may be regulated by the consistory in cooperation with other agencies. He may be engaged in such a task only after the classis of the calling church, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, has judged it to be spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling.

b. A minister may be loaned temporarily by his calling church to a congregation outside of the Christian Reformed Church for ordinary ministerial tasks, but only with the approval of classis, the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with synodical regulations. Although his duties may be regulated in cooperation with the other congregation, the supervision of his doctrine and life rests with the calling church.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 13

**Article 14**

a. A minister of the Word shall not leave the congregation with which he is connected for another church without the consent of the consistory.

b. A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, may not forsake his office. He may, however, be released from office to enter upon a non-ministerial vocation for such weighty reasons as shall receive the approval of the classis with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.

**Article 15**

Each church shall through its consistory provide for the proper support of its minister(s).

**Article 16**

A minister who for weighty reasons desires a temporary release from service to the congregation must have the approval of his consistory, which shall continue to have supervision over him.

**Article 17**

a. A minister who is neither eligible for retirement nor worthy of discipline may because of an intolerable situation existing between him and his church, be released from active ministerial service in his congregation. The consistory shall give such a release only with the approval of the classis with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies and in accordance with synodical regulations.

b. The consistory shall provide for the support of a released minister in such a way and for such a time as shall receive the approval of classis.

c. Eventually, if no call is forthcoming, he may at the discretion of classis and the synod be completely released from his ministerial office.



**Article 18**

a. A minister who has reached retirement age, or who because of physical or mental disability is incapable of performing the duties of his office, is eligible for retirement. Retirement shall take place with the approval of the consistory and classis and in accordance with synodical regulations.

b. A retired minister shall retain the honor and title of a minister of the Word and his official connection with the church which he served last, and this church shall be responsible for providing honorably for his support and that of his dependents according to synodical regulations.

c. Should the reasons for his retirement no longer exist, the minister emeritus shall request the consistory and classis which recommended him for retirement to declare him eligible for call.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 18

**Article 19**

The churches shall maintain a theological seminary at which men are trained for the ministry of the Word. The seminary shall be governed by synod through a board of trustees appointed by synod and responsible to it.

**Article 20**

The task of the ministers of the Word who are appointed as professors of theology is to train the seminary students for the ministry of the Word, expound the Word of God, and vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors.

**Article 21**

The churches shall encourage young men to seek to become ministers of the Word and shall grant financial aid to those who are in need of it. Every classis shall maintain a student fund.

**Article 22**

Students who have received licensure according to synodical regulations shall be permitted to exhort in the public worship services.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 22

**C. THE ELDERS AND DEACONS****Article 23**

The elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designated by the consistory. As a rule a specified number of them shall retire from office each year. The retiring office-bearers shall be succeeded by others unless the circumstances and the profit of the church make immediate eligibility for re-election advisable. Elders and deacons who are thus re-elected shall be re-installed.

**Article 24**

The elders, with the minister(s), shall have supervision over the congregation and their fellow office-bearers, exercising admonition and discipline and seeing to it that everything is done decently and in order. They shall, with the minister(s), exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism.

**Article 25**

a. The task of the deacons is to administer Christian mercy toward those who are in need, first of all toward those of the household of faith, but also toward the needy in general. In executing this task they shall diligently collect, administer, and distribute monies and other gifts, and shall serve the distressed with counsel and assistance.

b. They shall enable the needy under their care to make use of Christian institutions of mercy.

c. They shall confer and cooperate with diaconates of neighboring churches when this is desirable for the proper performance of their task.

d. They may also seek mutual understandings with other agencies in their community which are caring for the needy, so that the gifts may be distributed properly.

## II. THE ASSEMBLIES OF THE CHURCH

### A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

#### Article 26

The assemblies of the church are: the consistory, the classis and the synod.

#### Article 27

a. Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ; the authority of consistories being original, that of major assemblies being delegated.

b. The classis has the same authority over the consistory as the synod has over the classis.

#### Article 28

a. These assemblies shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner.

b. A major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern its churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assemblies.

c. Matters referred by minor assemblies to major assemblies shall be presented in harmony with the rules for classical and synodical procedure.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 28

#### Article 29

Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration. The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order.

#### Article 30

a. Assemblies and church members may appeal to the assembly next in order if they believe that injustice has been done or that a decision conflicts with the Word of God or the Church Order. Appellants shall observe all ecclesiastical regulations regarding the manner and time of appeal.

b. When written charges requiring formal adjudication by an ecclesiastical assembly are made, the relevant provisions of the Judicial Code shall be observed.

—Cf. Supplement, Articles 28, 30

#### Article 31

A request for revision of a decision shall be submitted to the assembly which made the decision. Such a request shall be honored only if sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented.

#### Article 32

a. The sessions of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer.

b. In every assembly there shall be a president whose duty it shall be to state and explain the business to be transacted, and to see to it that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed and that everyone observes due order and decorum in speaking. There shall also be a clerk whose task it shall be to keep an accurate record of the proceedings. In major assemblies the above named offices shall cease when the assembly adjourns.

c. Each assembly shall make proper provision for receiving communications, preparing agenda and acts, keeping files and archives, and conducting the financial transactions of the assembly.

d. Each assembly shall provide for the safeguarding of its property through proper incorporation.

#### Article 33

a. The assemblies may delegate to committees the execution of their decisions or the preparation of reports for future consideration. They shall give every committee a well-defined mandate, and shall require of them regular and complete reports of their work.

b. Each classis shall appoint a classical interim committee, and synod shall appoint a synodical interim committee, to act for them in matters which cannot wait action by the assemblies themselves. Such committees shall be given well-defined mandates and shall submit all their actions to the next meeting of the assembly for approval.

#### Article 34

The major assemblies are composed of office-bearers who are delegated by the constituent minor assemblies. The minor assemblies shall provide their delegates with proper credentials which authorize them to deliberate and vote on matters brought before the major assemblies. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which he himself or his church is particularly involved.



## B. THE CONSISTORY

**Article 35**

a. In every church there shall be a consistory composed of the office-bearers. The consistory is responsible for the general government of the church.

b. Where the number of elders is at least four, a distinction may be made between the general consistory, to which all office-bearers belong, and the restricted consistory, in which the deacons do not participate.

c. When such a distinction is made, the supervision and discipline of the congregation shall be vested in the restricted consistory. The work of Christian mercy shall be the task of the deacons, who shall render account of their work to the general consistory. All other matters belong to the general consistory.

**Article 36**

a. The consistory shall meet at least once a month, at a time and place announced to the congregation. Ordinarily the meeting shall be presided over by the minister, or in the absence of the minister by one of the elders.

b. The consistory, at least four times per year, shall exercise mutual censure, which concerns the performance of the official duties of the office-bearers.

**Article 37**

The consistory, besides seeking the cooperation of the congregation in the election of office-bearers, shall also invite its judgment about other major matters, except those which pertain to the supervision and discipline of the congregation. For this purpose the consistory shall call a meeting at least annually of all members entitled to vote. Such a meeting shall be conducted by the consistory, and only those matters which it presents shall be considered. Although full consideration shall be given to the judgment expressed by the congregation, the authority for making and carrying out final decisions remains with the consistory as the governing body of the church.

**Article 38**

a. Groups of believers among whom no consistory can as yet be constituted shall be under the care of a neighboring consistory, designated by classis.

b. When a consistory is being constituted for the first time the approval of classis is required.

## C. THE CLASSIS

**Article 39**

A classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches. The organizing of a new classis and the redistricting of classes require the approval of synod.

**Article 40**

a. The consistory of each church shall delegate a minister and an elder to the classis. If a church is without a minister, or the minister is prevented from attending, two elders shall be delegated. Office-bearers who are not delegated may also attend classis and may be given an advisory voice.

b. The classis shall meet at least every four months, unless great distances render this impractical, at such time and place as was determined by the previous classical meeting.

c. The ministers shall either preside in rotation, or one shall be chosen to preside; however, the same minister shall not be chosen twice in succession.

**Article 41**

In order properly to assist the churches, the president, on behalf of classis, shall among other things present the following questions to the delegates of each church:

1. Are the consistory meetings regularly held in your church; and are they held according to the needs of the congregation?
2. Is church discipline faithfully exercised?
3. Are the needy adequately cared for?
4. Does the consistory diligently promote the cause of Christian education from elementary school through institutions of higher learning?
5. a. Have you submitted to the secretary of our Home Mission Board the names and addresses of all baptized and communicant members who have, since the last meeting of classis, moved to a place where no Christian Reformed churches are found?
- b. Have you informed other consistories or pastors about members who reside, even temporarily, in the vicinity of their church?
- c. Have you, having been informed yourself of such members in your own area, done all in your power to serve them with the ministry of your church?
6. Does the consistory diligently engage in and promote the work of evangelism in its community?

**Article 42**

a. The classis shall appoint at least one committee composed of two of the more experienced and competent office-bearers, two ministers, or one minister and one elder, to visit all its churches once a year.

b. The church visitors shall ascertain whether the office-bearers faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and properly promote the edification of the congregation and the extension of God's kingdom. They shall fraternally admonish those who have been negligent, and help all with advice and assistance.

c. The churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious problems arise.

d. The church visitors shall render to classis a written report of their work.

**Article 43**

The classis may grant the right to exhort within its bounds to men who are gifted, well-informed, consecrated, and able to edify the churches. When the urgent need for their services has been established, the classis shall examine such men and license them as exhorters for a limited period of time.

**Article 44**

A classis may take counsel or joint action with its neighboring classis or classes in matters of mutual concern.

**D. THE SYNOD****Article 45**

The synod is the assembly representing the churches of all the classes. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders to the synod.

**Article 46**

a. Synod shall meet annually, at a time and place determined by the previous synod. Each synod shall designate a church to convene the following synod.

b. The convening church, with the approval of the synodical interim committee, may call a special session of synod, but only in very extraordinary circumstances and with the observance of synodical regulations.

c. The officers of synod shall be elected and shall function in accordance with the Rules for Synodical Procedure.

**Article 47**

The task of synod includes the adoption of the creeds, of the Church Order, of the liturgical forms, of the Psalter Hymnal, and of the principles and elements of the order of worship, as well as the designation of the Bible versions to be used in the worship services.

No substantial alterations shall be effected by synod in these matters unless the churches have had prior opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes.

**Article 48**

a. Upon the nomination of the classes, synod shall appoint ministers, one from each classis to serve as synodical deputies for a term designated by synod.

b. When the cooperation of the synodical deputies is required as stipulated in the Church Order, the presence of at least three deputies from the nearest classes shall be prescribed.

c. Besides the duties elsewhere stipulated, the deputies shall, upon request, extend help to the classes in the event of difficulties in order that proper unity, order, and sound doctrine may be maintained.

d. The synodical deputies shall submit a complete report of their actions to the next synod.



**Article 49**

a. Synod shall appoint a committee to correspond with other Reformed churches so that the Christian Reformed Church may exercise Christian fellowship with other denominations and may promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ.

b. Synod shall decide which denominations are to be received into ecclesiastical fellowship, and shall establish the rules which govern these relationships.

**Article 50**

a. Synod shall send delegates to Reformed ecumenical synods in which the Christian Reformed Church cooperates with other denominations which confess and maintain the Reformed faith.

b. Synod may present to such gatherings matters on which it seeks the judgment of the Reformed churches throughout the world.

c. Decisions of Reformed ecumenical synods shall be binding upon the Christian Reformed Church only when they have been ratified by its synod.

**III. THE TASK AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CHURCH****A. WORSHIP SERVICES****Article 51**

a. The congregation shall assemble for worship at least twice on the Lord's day to hear God's Word, to receive the sacraments, to engage in praise and prayer, and to present gifts of gratitude.

b. Worship services shall be held in observance of Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, and Pentecost, and ordinarily on Old and New Year's Day, and annual days of prayer and thanksgiving.

c. Special worship services may be proclaimed in times of great stress or blessing for church, nation, or world.

**Article 52**

a. The consistory shall regulate the worship services.

b. The consistory shall see to it that the synodically-approved Bible versions, liturgical forms, and songs are used, and that the principles and elements of the order of worship approved by synod are observed.

c. The consistory shall see to it that if choirs or others sing in the worship services, they observe the synodical regulations governing the content of the hymns and anthems sung. These regulations shall also apply when supplementary hymns are sung by the congregation.

**Article 53**

a. The ministers of the Word shall conduct the worship services.

b. Persons licensed to exhort and anyone appointed by the consistory to read a sermon may conduct worship services. They shall, however, refrain from all official acts of the ministry.

c. Only sermons approved by the consistory shall be read in the worship services.

**Article 54**

a. In the worship services the minister of the Word shall officially explain and apply Holy Scripture.

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

**Article 55**

The sacraments shall be administered upon the authority of the consistory in the public worship service, by the minister of the Word, with the use of the prescribed forms.

**Article 56**

The covenant of God shall be sealed to children of believers by holy baptism. The consistory shall see to it that baptism is requested and administered as soon as feasible.

**Article 57**

Adults who have not been baptized shall receive holy baptism upon public profession of faith. The Form for the Baptism of Adults shall be used for such public professions.

**Article 58**

The baptism of one who comes from another Christian denomination shall be held valid if it has been administered in the name of the triune God, by someone authorized by that denomination.

**Article 59**

a. Members by baptism shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper upon a public profession of Christ according to the Reformed creeds, with the use of the prescribed form. Before the profession of faith the consistory shall examine them concerning their motives, doctrine, and conduct. The names of those who are to be admitted to the Lord's Supper shall be announced to the congregation for approval at least one Sunday before the public profession of faith.

b. Confessing members coming from other Christian Reformed congregations shall be admitted to communicant membership upon the presentation of certificates of membership attesting their soundness in doctrine and life.

c. Confessing members coming from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to communicant membership upon presentation of certificates or statements of membership after the consistory has satisfied itself concerning the doctrine and conduct of the members. Persons coming from other denominations shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and conduct. The consistory shall determine in each case whether to admit them directly or by public reaffirmation or profession of faith. Their names shall be announced to the congregation for approval.

**Article 60**

a. The Lord's Supper shall be administered at least once every three months.

b. The consistory shall provide for such administrations as it shall judge most conducive to edification. However, the ceremonies as prescribed in God's Word shall not be changed.

c. The Lord's Supper shall ordinarily be preceded by a preparatory sermon and followed by an applicatory sermon.

**Article 61**

a. The public prayers in the worship services shall include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession for all Christendom and all men.

b. In the ministry of prayer the approved liturgical prayers may be used.

**Article 62**

In the worship services Christian alms shall be received regularly.

**B. CATECHETICAL INSTRUCTION****Article 63**

Each church shall instruct its youth—and others who are interested—in the teaching of the Scriptures as formulated in the creeds of the church, in order to prepare them to profess their faith publicly and to assume their Christian responsibilities in the church and in the world.

**Article 64**

a. Catechetical instruction shall be supervised by the consistory.

b. The instruction shall be given by the minister of the Word with the help, if necessary, of the elders and others appointed by the consistory.

c. The Heidelberg Catechism and its Compendium shall be the basis of instruction. Selection of additional instructional helps shall be made by the minister in consultation with the consistory.



## C. PASTORAL CARE

**Article 65**

Pastoral care shall be exercised over all the members of the congregation. The minister of the Word and the elders shall conduct annual home visitation, and faithfully visit the sick, the distressed, the shut-ins, and the erring. They shall encourage the members to live by faith, comfort them in adversity, and warn them against errors in doctrine and life.

**Article 66**

a. Confessing members who remove to another Christian Reformed church are entitled to a certificate, issued by the consistory, concerning their doctrine and life. When such certificates of membership are requested, they shall ordinarily be mailed to the church of their new residence.

b. Members by baptism who remove to another Christian Reformed church shall upon proper request be granted a certificate of baptism, to which such notations as are necessary shall be attached. Such certificates shall as a rule be mailed to the church of their new residence.

c. Ecclesiastical certificates shall be signed by the president and clerk of the consistory.

**Article 67**

Members who move to localities where there is no Christian Reformed church may, upon their request, either retain their membership in the church of their former residence, or have their certificates sent to the nearest Christian Reformed church. —Cf. Supplement, Article 67

**Article 68**

Each church shall keep a complete record of all births, deaths, baptisms, professions of faith, receptions and dismissals of members, and excommunications and other terminations of membership.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 68

**Article 69**

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

b. Christian marriages should be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises, and prayers, as provided for in the official form. Marriages may be solemnized either in a worship service, or in private gatherings of relatives and friends.

c. Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would be in conflict with the Word of God.

**Article 70**

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

**Article 71**

The consistory shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools, and shall urge parents to have their children instructed in these schools according to the demands of the covenant.

**Article 72**

The consistory shall promote societies within the congregation for the study of God's Word and shall serve especially the youth organizations with counsel and assistance. All such societies are under the supervision of the consistory.

## D. MISSIONS

**Article 73**

a. 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.

b. In fulfilling this mandate, each consistory shall stimulate the members of the congregation to be witnesses for Christ in word and deed, and to support the work of home and foreign missions by their interest, prayers, and gifts.

**Article 74**

a. Each church shall bring the gospel to unbelievers in its own community. This task shall be sponsored and governed by the consistory.

b. This task may be executed, when conditions warrant, in cooperation with one or more neighboring churches.

**Article 75**

The classes shall, whenever necessary, assist the churches in their local evangelistic programs. The classes themselves may perform this work of evangelism when it is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches. To administer these tasks each classis shall have a classical home missions committee.

**Article 76**

a. Synod shall encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of evangelism, and shall also carry on such home mission activities as are beyond the scope and resources of minor assemblies.

b. To administer these activities synod shall appoint a denominational home missions committee, whose work shall be controlled by synodical regulations.  
—Cf. Supplement, Article 76

**Article 77**

a. Synod shall determine the field in which the joint foreign mission work of the churches is to be carried on, regulate the manner in which this task is to be performed, provide for its cooperative support, and encourage the congregations to call and support missionaries.

b. To administer these activities synod shall appoint a denominational foreign missions committee, whose work shall be controlled by synodical regulations.  
—Cf. Supplement, Article 77

## IV. THE ADMONITION AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH

## A. GENERAL PROVISIONS

**Article 78**

a. The admonition and discipline of the church are spiritual in character and therefore require the use of spiritual means.

b. The exercise of admonition and discipline by the consistory does not preclude the responsibility of the believers to watch over and to admonish one another in love.

**Article 79**

The purpose of the admonition and discipline of the church is to maintain the honor of God, to restore the sinner, and to remove offense from the church of Christ.

**Article 80**

All members of the congregation are subject in both doctrine and life to the admonition and discipline of the church.

**Article 81**

Commission of sins which give public offense or which are brought to the attention of the consistory according to the rule of Matthew 18:15-17 shall make one liable to the discipline of the church.

**Article 82**

Disciplinary measures shall be applied only after an adequate investigation has been made and the member involved has had ample opportunity to present his case.

## B. THE ADMONITION AND DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS

**Article 83**

a. Members by baptism who wilfully neglect to make public profession of faith, or are delinquent in doctrine or life, and do not heed the admonitions of the consistory shall be dealt with in accordance with the regulations of synod and, if they persist in their sin, shall be excluded from the church of Christ.

b. Members by baptism who have been excluded from the church and who later repent of their sin shall be received again into the church only upon public profession of faith.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 83



**Article 84**

Confessing members who have offended in doctrine or in life and who have responded favorably to the admonitions of the consistory shall be reconciled to the church upon sufficient evidence of repentance. The method of reconciliation is to be determined by the consistory.

**Article 85**

Confessing members who have offended in doctrine or in life and who obstinately reject the admonitions of the consistory shall be barred from partaking of the Lord's Supper, responding to the baptismal questions, and exercising any other rights of membership.

**Article 86**

a. Confessing members who have been barred from the Lord's Supper and who after repeated admonitions show no signs of repentance shall be excommunicated from the church of Christ. The Form for Excommunication shall be used for this purpose.

b. The consistory, before excommunicating anyone, shall make three announcements in which the nature of the offense and the obstinacy of the sinner are explained and the congregation is urged to pray for him and to admonish him. In the first announcement the name of the sinner shall ordinarily be withheld but may be mentioned at the discretion of the consistory. In the second, after the classis has given its approval to proceed with further discipline, his name shall be mentioned. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that unless the sinner repents he will be excommunicated on a specified date.

**Article 87**

When anyone who has been excommunicated desires to become reconciled to the church, the consistory, having satisfied itself as to the sincerity of his repentance, shall announce these developments to the congregation. If no valid objections are presented, he shall be restored to the fellowship of the church of Christ. The Form for Readmission shall be used for this purpose.

**C. THE ADMONITION AND DISCIPLINE OF OFFICE BEARERS****Article 88**

a. Ministers, elders, and deacons, besides being subject to general discipline, are also subject to special discipline, which consists of suspension and deposition from office.

b. General discipline shall not be applied to an office-bearer unless he has first been suspended from office.

**Article 89**

a. Special discipline shall be applied to office-bearers if they violate the Form of Subscription, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.

b. The appropriate assembly shall determine whether, in a given instance, deposition from office shall take place immediately, without previous suspension.

**Article 90**

a. The suspension of a minister of the Gospel shall be imposed by the consistory of his church with the concurring judgment of the consistory of the nearest church in the same classis.

b. If the neighboring consistory fails to concur in the position of the consistory of the minister involved, the latter consistory shall either alter its original judgment or present the case to classis.

c. The deposition of a minister shall not be effected without the approval of classis together with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.

**Article 91**

a. The suspension or deposition of an elder or deacon shall be imposed by the consistory with the concurring judgment of the consistory of the nearest church in the same classis.

b. If the neighboring consistory fails to concur in the position of the consistory of the elder or deacon involved, the latter consistory shall either alter its original judgment or present the case to classis.

**Article 92**

a. A minister of the Word whose membership resides with a congregation other than his calling church is subject to the admonition and discipline of the consistories of both churches. Either consistory may initiate disciplinary action, but neither shall act without conferring with the other.

b. If the consistories disagree, the case shall be submitted to the classis of the calling church for disposition.

**Article 93**

a. The suspension of an office-bearer shall be lifted only upon sufficient evidence of repentance.

b. The lifting of suspension is the prerogative of the assembly which imposed suspension.

**Article 94**

a. A deposed office-bearer shall not be restored unless he gives sufficient evidence of genuine repentance. It must further be evident that, should he be restored to office, he could then serve without being hindered in his work by the handicap of his past sin and that his restoration would be to the glory of God and for the true welfare of the church.

b. The judgment as to whether a deposed minister shall subsequently be declared eligible for call shall be made by the classis in which he was deposed, together with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.

**CONCLUSION****Article 95**

No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no office-bearer shall lord it over another office-bearer.

**Article 96**

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

**CHURCH ORDER SUPPLEMENTS**

A listing of synodical regulations pertaining to Church Order Articles

**SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 5****GUIDELINES AND REGULATIONS RE GRAVAMINA**

Synod declares that gravamina fall into at least two basic types:

1. A *confessional-difficulty gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber expresses his personal difficulty with the confession but does not call for a revision of the confessions, and
2. A *confessional-revision gravamen*: a gravamen in which a subscriber makes a specific recommendation for revision of the confessions.

A. *Guidelines* as to the meaning of subscription to the confessions by means of the Form of Subscription:

1. The person signing the Form of Subscription subscribes without reservation to all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church, as being doctrines which are taught in the Word of God.
2. The subscriber *does not* by his subscription declare that these doctrines are all stated in the best possible manner, or that the standards of our church cover all that the Scriptures teach on the matters confessed. Nor does he declare that every teaching of the Scriptures is set forth in our confessions, or that every heresy is rejected and refuted by them.
3. A subscriber is only bound by his subscription to those doctrines which are confessed, and is not bound to the references, allusions and remarks that are incidental to the formulation of these doctrines nor to the theological deductions which some may draw from the doctrines set forth in the confessions. However, no one is free to decide for himself or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. In the event that such a question should arise, the decision of the assemblies of the church shall be sought and acquiesced in.



B. *Regulations* concerning the procedure to be followed in the submission of a *confessional-difficulty gravamen*:

1. Ministers (whether missionaries, professors, or others not serving congregations as pastors), elders or deacons shall submit their "difficulties and different sentiments" to their consistories for examination and judgment. Should a consistory decide that it is not able to judge the gravamen submitted to it, it shall submit the matter to classis for examination and judgment. If the classis, after examination, judges that it is unable to decide the matter, it may submit it to synod, in accordance with the principles of the Church Order, Article 28, b.

2. In all instances of confessional-difficulty gravamina, the matter shall not be open for discussion by the whole church since this type of gravamen is a personal request for information and/or clarification of the confession. Hence this type of gravamen should be dealt with pastorally and personally by the assembly addressed.

C. *Regulations* concerning the procedure to be followed in the submission of a *confessional-revision gravamen*:

1. The basic assumption of the church in requiring subscription to the Form of Subscription is that "all the articles and points of doctrine" contained in the confessions of the church "do fully agree with the Word of God." The burden of proof, therefore, rests upon the subscriber who calls upon the church to justify or revise her confessions.

2. Ministers (including missionaries, professors or all others not serving congregations as pastors), elders or deacons shall submit their gravamina calling for revision of the confessions to their consistories for examination and judgment. Should the consistory decide that it is not able to judge the gravamen submitted to it, it shall submit the matter to classis for examination and judgment. If the classis, after examination, judges that it is unable to decide the matter, classis may submit it to synod, in accordance with the principles of the Church Order, Article 28, b.

3. If the gravamen is *adopted* by the consistory and the classis as its own, it becomes an overture to the broader assemblies and therefore it is open for discussion in the whole church.

4. If the gravamen is *rejected* by the classis it may be appealed to synod; and when the constituted synod declares the matter to be legally before it for action, all the signers of the Form of Subscription shall be free to discuss it together with the whole church until adjudicated by synod.

5. Since the subscriber has the right of appeal from the judgment of a consistory to classis and from classis to synod, the mere fact that the matter is being appealed shall not be a reason for suspending or otherwise disciplining an office-bearer, provided other provisions of the Form of Subscription and the Church Order are observed.

6. A revision of the confessions shall not be adopted by synod until the whole church membership has had adequate opportunity to consider it.

*Grounds:*

a. The history of the functioning of the Form of Subscription shows that if such guidelines and regulations had been available and followed, considerable delay and confusion might have been avoided.

b. These guidelines and regulations will make the signing of the Form of Subscription more meaningful and will remove some common misunderstandings that now exist on the part of many office-bearers.

c. These guidelines and regulations will prove helpful to consistory, classis and synod in dealing with matters submitted to them for examination in accordance with the Form of Subscription.

(Acts of Synod 1976, pp. 68-70)

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 6

A. *Students having studied theology at other seminaries* shall at least take the senior year at our seminary before they shall be declared eligible for call in our churches.

(Acts of Synod 1924, p. 38)

B. Non-regular students shall also be declared candidates by synod after being interviewed by the board. Recommendations regarding academic qualifications, doctrinal soundness, spiritual fitness, and personality are to be presented to the board by the Calvin Seminary faculty and by the faculties of such schools where the applicant has studied.

(Cf. Acts 1961, p. 55)

See also Supplement, Article 10.

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 7

## A. CANDIDACY BY WAY OF ARTICLE 7

1. If anyone wishes to be admitted to the ministry of the Word in accordance with Article 7 he should apply to his consistory and after that to the classis. Together with the delegates of examination from the neighboring classes, the classis shall first of all examine the written credentials of the consistory concerning the required qualifications as stated in Article 7 and thereupon the classis itself shall proceed to examine him to ascertain whether these qualifications be present. If the preliminary judgment is favorable, the petitioner is to be given the right, for some time, to exhort in vacant churches within the classis. He shall also exhort a few times in churches that are not vacant in the presence of the respective ministers of these churches. The length of this period of probation is to be determined by classis.

2. At the close of the period of probation, the classis, together with the aforesaid delegates for examination, shall take a final decision regarding the petitioner's "exceptional gifts." If the decision is in the affirmative, the classis shall subject the petitioner to a preparatory examination in the following subjects:

- a. Exegesis of the Old and New Testaments
- b. Bible History
- c. Dogmatics
- d. General and American Church History.

3. If the examination is favorable to the petitioner, he shall be declared eligible for a call.

4. The final classical (peremptoir) examination follows later in accordance with existing regulations, excepting the ancient languages.

(Agenda 1920, pp. 26, 27; Acts of Synod 1922, pp. 72, 73)

## B. DECLARATIONS RE ADMITTANCE BY WAY OF ARTICLE 7

1. Synod reminds the churches that Article 7 of the Church Order was adopted in a time when there was a dire need for ministers of the Word. This article should function only in case of great need.

2. The "gifts" mentioned in Article 7 should be possessed by a candidate in a very exceptional measure. No one should be considered unless he has extraordinary qualities.

3. Not only the qualifications mentioned in Article 7 should be considered but such a candidate should also possess exceptional knowledge of the Word, knowledge of spiritual needs, and native ability to apply the Word.

4. This article should never be used as a means to ordain all lay workers who may desire such, and whose prestige would be increased by such action. The churches are reminded that the regular door to the ministry is a thorough academic training. This must be maintained in theory and practice.

(Acts of Synod 1947, p. 94)



## C. SPECIAL ADVICE FOR INDIAN MISSION FIELD

1. That the following be the method by which the ordination of native workers is to be effected:

- a. That capable men, who feel the call to the gospel ministry, be encouraged to pursue the regular course of study for ordination.
- b. That those who are not able to pursue that course, and who possess exceptional gifts, be advised to seek ordination under the pattern prescribed by Article 7 of the Church Order, and make known their desire to their consistory, or Indian General Conference, where no consistory exists.

2. For those seeking ordination by way of Article 7 of the Church Order, the following procedure is recommended:

a. The written credentials of the consistory or General Conference concerning the required qualifications stated in Article 7 are to be forwarded to Classis Rocky Mountain.

b. Upon receipt of application, together with the recommendation of the consistory or the favorable advice of the General Conference, the classis, in conjunction with the synodical delegates, shall determine whether it considers the aspirant eligible for further examination under Article 7.

c. If the preliminary judgment is favorable, the applicant will be instructed to speak a word of edification at several of the preaching centers on the Indian Field in the presence of the missionary and in at least two of the churches of classis in the presence of the ministers of these churches. Classis shall regulate these appointments and determine the length of this period of probation.

d. At the termination of this period of probation the classis, in conjunction with the synodical delegates, shall take a final decision regarding the qualifications of the candidate. If the decision is in the affirmative, then the classis shall give the applicant a preliminary examination in the following branches: (1) Exegesis of the English Old and New Testaments; (2) Bible History; (3) Dogmatics; (4) Church History; (5) Practica.

e. The missionary of the applicant as representative of Indian General Conference shall be present in an advisory capacity at those sessions of classis in which the case of the applicant is being considered.

f. If the applicant is successful in the examination he is declared eligible to a call.

g. The examination for ordination follows later according to existing rules, except in the classical languages. (Acts of Synod 1958, pp. 87, 88)

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 8

## A. NOMINATING MINISTERS WHO HAVE SERVED THEIR PRESENT CHURCHES LESS THAN TWO YEARS

The synod judges that consistories of vacant churches when nominating, should not place in nomination the names of ministers who have served their present churches less than two years, unless there are very special and weighty reasons. And if the counselor deems it necessary, in the name of classis, to approve a nomination bearing the name of a minister having served his present church less than two years, he shall give account of such action to the classis.

(Acts of Synod 1916, p. 29)

## B. CALLING SAME MINISTER WITHIN A YEAR

Calling the same minister twice for the same vacancy may not take place within a year without the advice of classis.

(Acts of Synod 1906, p. 16)

## C. CALLING MINISTERS FROM OTHER DENOMINATIONS

*WHEN INITIATED BY ACTION OF THE CONSISTORY*

1. Ministers from other denominations may be called by Christian Reformed churches in exceptional cases.

2. Before a consistory nominates a minister from another denomination it must:

- a. Establish that there is a pressing local need.
- b. Establish that the needs of the local church can best be met by the proposed nominee.
- c. Obtain the approval of classis or of the counselor in the name of classis.
- d. Obtain the approval of three synodical deputies who shall have conferred with each other before rendering their advice (by mail if necessary).

3. Classes and synodical deputies shall give objective consideration to such proposed nominations, seeking to be entirely faithful to established regulations and furnishing reasons in the event of disapproval.

4. Synodical deputies shall use the following criteria for approving or disapproving the proposed nominee:

- a. Soundness of doctrine.
- b. Sanctity of life.
- c. Knowledge and appreciation of Christian Reformed practice and usage.
- d. Sufficient formal education. The nominee shall submit a diploma, or statement of credits, from an accredited college and recognized seminary to indicate his scholastic attainment. A measure of discretionary power is granted the classis in connection with the matter of scholastic attainment of the nominee, but when such power is exercised by classis, it shall be in consultation with the synodical deputies. Only when classis and the synodical deputies are agreed may the nominee be approved.
- e. Need of calling other than Christian Reformed ministers.



5. When ministers from foreign countries are being proposed for nomination, the synodical deputies shall use the following additional standards:
  - a. Ability to speak or to learn the English language.
  - b. Ability to adjust to the American-Canadian situation.
  - c. Age limit of 40 as a general rule.
6. Before a pastor-elect from another denomination may be installed, the consistory must arrange with the classis for a "colloquium doctum" to be conducted. When the classis and the synodical deputies are satisfied with the results of this colloquium, the pastor-elect is admitted to our denomination and may be installed.

#### WHEN INITIATED BY ACTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL MINISTER

1. A minister of another denomination desiring to be declared eligible for a call in the Christian Reformed Church shall make application to the Christian Reformed classis in which, or nearest which, his field of labor is located.
2. The approval of three synodical deputies shall be obtained before the classis shall proceed to honor the request of the applicant.
3. A classis and synodical deputies, considering such a request, must be convinced that there is in the Christian Reformed Church a need which the applicant is qualified to fulfill.
4. Classis and the synodical deputies shall give objective consideration to such requests, seeking to be entirely faithful to established regulations and furnishing reasons in the event of disapproval.
5. The minister making application to be declared eligible for a call, shall present the following documents to the classis or classical committee in ample time so that the documents may be examined and considered in consultation with the synodical deputies prior to the classical examination:
  - a. A testimonial from his consistory or classis, session or presbytery, concerning his purity of doctrine and sanctity of life. It is conceivable that just because the applicant is loyal to the Word and creeds that he is adjudged *persona non grata* by his own ecclesiastical assemblies and that he would not be granted such a testimonial. Should such be the case a careful preliminary investigation must be made by the classis in consultation with the synodical deputies. The report of this investigation if satisfactory to the classis and synodical deputies, will serve under such circumstances in lieu of the testimonial.
  - b. A diploma, or statement of credits, from an accredited college and recognized seminary to indicate the scholastic attainment of the applicant. A measure of discretionary power is granted the classis in connection with the matter of scholastic attainment of the applicant, but when such power is exercised by classis, it shall be in consultation with the synodical deputies. Only when both classis and synodical deputies are agreed, may the applicant be examined.
  - c. A statement of health from a recognized physician.

6. The various documents and reports having been presented and adjudged satisfactory by classis and the synodical deputies, the applicant must submit to a careful examination regarding his soundness in the Reformed faith and the exemplariness of his life. Classis in conjunction with the synodical deputies shall determine whether the applicant shall submit to a "colloquium doctum" or a full classical examination.
7. The following criteria shall be applied for approving or disapproving the applicant:
  - a. Soundness of doctrine.
  - b. Sanctity of life.
  - c. Knowledge and appreciation of Christian Reformed practice and usage.
8. The applicant, having sustained the examination, and having received the approbation of the synodical deputies, may now be declared eligible for call. No further examination or "colloquium doctum" will be required of the minister thus declared eligible.

(Acts of Synod 1968, pp. 21-24)



## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 10

## CLASSICAL EXAMINATION OF CANDIDATES

Synod emphasizes the importance of the examination for ordination by the classis in which the calling church is located after a candidate has accepted a call.

*Grounds:*

- a. This examination is an integral part of the lawful calling as outlined in Article 10 of the Church Order.
  - b. There has been a danger of considering this examination superfluous since synod conducted a previous examination.
- Synod adopted the following regulations for classical examination for ordination:
- a. Examination in Introduction and the six loci of dogmatics, allowing at least fifteen minutes for the examination in each locus, including scriptural proof.
  - b. Examination in Ethics.
  - c. Examination in Church History, including the history of the Christian Reformed Church.
  - d. Examination in Christian Reformed Church Polity.
  - e. Examination in the Knowledge of the Scriptures.
  - f. Examination in exegesis of both Old and New Testament. Passages of both Old and New Testament should be assigned the candidate at least three weeks prior to the examination.
  - g. Examination in the Knowledge of the Standards.
  - h. Examination in Practica.

(Acts of Synod 1961, pp. 55-56)

## RULES OF PROCEDURE RELATED TO CANDIDATES

1. The letter of call to a candidate must indicate the provisional nature of this call until the classical examination has been sustained.

*Grounds:*

- a. The calling church cannot issue an unconditional call to a candidate before the classical examination has been sustained.
  - b. This conditional character of the letter of call underscores the decisive nature of the classical examination.
2. No candidate shall move into the parsonage of the calling church before he has sustained the classical examination.\*

\*When this rule presents difficulties, consistories shall be permitted to seek the concurrence of the Classical Interim Committee to allow for waiver of the rule. (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 89)

*Ground:* The practice of moving in before that examination has been sustained tends to prejudice the outcome of the examination.

3. The date of ordination shall be officially announced only after the candidate has passed the examination.

*Ground:* Announcing the date of ordination before the classical examination is completed tends to prejudice the outcome of the examination.

4. The candidate shall preach a sermon on a text assigned by classis, in an official worship service in the presence of classical representatives, preferably on the Sunday preceding the meeting of classis, and in the church to which he has been called.

*Grounds:*

- a. The sermon is such an important part of the examination that it warrants delivery in a regular worship service.
  - b. It is extremely difficult for a candidate to preach and to proclaim the Word of God in a deliberative meeting such as classis.
5. A copy of the candidate's sermon shall be provided by classis to the synodical deputies and to the delegates to classis.

*Ground:* This will be conducive to a thorough examination of the contents of the sermon by all who are called upon to pass judgment at classis.

In addition to the required sermon on an assigned text, the candidate shall submit to each of the sermon critics of classis copies of two other sermons which he has preached as a student, one based on a Scripture text and the other on a Lord's Day of the Heidelberg Catechism. The combination of Scripture texts should include both the Old Testament and the New Testament. These sermons shall not include those which have been used in practice preaching, or for academic evaluation, in the seminary.

*Grounds:*

- a. The submission of additional sermons provides a better basis for sermon evaluation at this examination which is decisive for the candidate's ordination.
  - b. The inclusion of a sermon on the Heidelberg Catechism is consistent with the requirement of the *Church Order* regarding catechism preaching (Article 54, b). (Acts of Synod 1975, p. 90)
6. Four classical delegates shall be appointed as the official examiners, two to function as sermon critics and to be present at the worship service in which the total sermon is being preached, and two to conduct the actual examination at the time classis meets.

*Grounds:*

- a. A better rapport with the candidate will be established with a smaller number of examiners.
  - b. The small number of examiners needed enables the classis to make a more appropriate selection of men for this task.
7. Synod adopted the following schedule for classical examination:
- a. *Introduction: a classical examiner shall introduce the candidate to the classis.*
  - b. *The examination proper shall consist of inquiry into three main areas as follows:*

I. PRACTICA (no time limit)

1. The classical examiner shall inquire into the candidate's relationship to God and his commitment to the ministry, his understanding of the meaning and relevance of the ministry for our times, his loyalty to the church, and related matters.
2. The synodical deputies and delegates shall have opportunity to ask additional questions.
3. Before proceeding to the next area of inquiry, a motion to proceed shall carry.

II. SERMON EVALUATION

1. In the presence of the candidate, the written sermon shall be evaluated, and attention shall be given to his manner of conducting a worship service.
2. Additional questions with reference to the sermon and its delivery shall be allowed.
3. Before proceeding to the next area, a motion to proceed shall carry with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.

III. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL POSITION (minimum, thirty minutes per candidate)

1. The examiner shall inquire into the candidate's biblical and theological judgment, competence, and soundness.
  2. Opportunity shall be provided for additional questions. (No specific time limit)
- c. *Procedure for admitting to the ministry:*
1. A motion to admit shall be received and given preliminary consideration in executive session.
  2. Prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit shall be offered.
  3. The synodical deputies shall leave the floor to prepare their recommendation.
  4. The classis shall vote by ballot.
  5. The synodical deputies shall offer their written statement, from which it will become evident whether or not they can concur with the decision of classis.
  6. In the event they do not concur, the classis and the synodical deputies may try to reach a unified decision.
  7. In the event that agreement cannot be reached between them, the matter is automatically referred to the synod for final adjudication.

*Grounds:*

- a. This procedure will allow both the classis and the synodical deputies to arrive at their decisions independently.
- b. The procedure previously adopted can influence the classis unduly.
- c. The Church Order consistently speaks about "concurring advice of the synodical deputies." There can be no concurring advice if the classis does not reach its decision at the same time as the synodical deputies.

(Acts of Synod 1972, pp. 44-46)



## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 13

## REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO ARTICLE 13b OF THE CHURCH ORDER

A minister whose service is requested by a congregation outside the CRC may be loaned temporarily to serve such a church while still retaining his ministerial status in the CRC in keeping with the following regulations:

- a. The congregation seeking the services of the CR minister is desirous of the Reformed faith and seriously contemplates affiliation with the CRC or some other Reformed denomination, or is already in a Reformed denomination and seeks to be strengthened in the Reformed faith.
- b. The minister contemplating service in an undenominational church acknowledges it as his duty to bring such a church into the CRC, or at least into a Reformed denomination similar to the CRC.
- c. The duties of the minister are spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling, and such duties do not conflict with his commitment to the faith and practice of the CRC as required by his signature to the Form of Subscription.
- d. If the congregation to be served is in close proximity to a CR congregation of another classis, the approval of that classis shall be required, in addition to the approval of the classis of the minister's calling church, and the synodical deputies.
- e. The loaning of such ministerial services may be for a period of time not to exceed two years. Extensions of not more than two years each may be granted if circumstances warrant, with the approval of classis and the synodical deputies.
- f. Should the minister become subject to discipline, the non-CR congregation which he is serving shall have the right to suspend him from his service to that church, but suspension from office and deposition may be applied only by the CRC.
- g. Continuation under the CRC Pension Plan shall require that the minister, or the non-CR church which he serves, shall contribute to the Ministers' Pension Fund the amount which is determined annually by the Ministers' Pension Fund Committee for ministers serving in extraordinary positions outside of our denomination. (Acts of Synod 1976, pp. 33-34)

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 18

## RETIREMENT

Ministers shall have the privilege of retiring at the age of sixty-five years. (Acts of Synod 1956, p. 19)

Ministerial professors in the college and seminary shall be granted the privilege of honorable retirement with full retirement benefits at the age of sixty-five, if they so desire. (Acts of Synod 1960, p. 35)

Supervision of an emeritus minister (except when he remains as a member in his last congregation, or when the emeritation is expected to be of a temporary nature), may be transferred, at his request, to the church of which he becomes a member after emeritation.

This transfer is to be made in the following manner: the consistory of the church which the emeritus minister served last formally requests the consistory of the church which the emeritus minister wishes to join, to exercise supervision over him. (Acts of Synod 1968, p. 69)

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 22

## A. RULES FOR LICENSURE

1. The Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary may grant licensure to conduct religious services in our church only to such as:
  - a. Are enrolled as regular students in our seminary.
  - b. Have successfully passed the final examination of the junior year in the seminary.
2. The board shall not grant licensure to such students till it has made sure of the following with respect to each applicant:
  - a. That he is a member in good standing in our churches.
  - b. That he has spiritual qualifications necessary for the ministry, and that he considers himself called of God to prepare himself for the office of ministering the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
  - c. That he intends to enter the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.
  - d. That he has sufficient knowledge of the Bible, and especially of our Reformed principles to act as a guide to others.
  - e. That he speaks acceptably and to the edification of the churches. It is left to the discretion of the board, however, whether it will obtain this information by consulting the seminary faculty or by examining the applicant.
3. The board has the right to extend the licensure of those who want to take post-graduate work, but with the understanding:
  - a. That this privilege is to be granted only to such who are taking post-graduate work in theology, and declare that it is their definite intention to enter the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.
  - b. That this extension is valid for no more than one year.
  - c. That further extension may be given at the end of the first year in case the applicant makes his request in writing, and at the end of the second year if he appears in person and is willing to submit to another examination (the latter part of rule 3c does not apply to those who are taking post-graduate work in theology outside of the United States or Canada).
4. The board is obliged to revoke the licensure:
  - a. Of those who have completed their theological studies but have failed to take steps to enter into the sacred ministry of the Word.
  - b. Of those undergraduates who either discontinue their studies or fail to enroll again at the seminary. (Acts of Synod 1936, pp. 46-48)

## B. LICENSURE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS

1. The student must be a communicant member of a sound Reformed church and must be a regular or special student at our seminary.
2. The student must have sufficient training at our school so that the faculty can recommend him, as to his academic competence and ability to speak fluent English.
3. The student must have completed the course in homiletics required of our students or passed an equivalent course in some other school, and must demonstrate his ability to exhort to the satisfaction of our professor in Homiletics.
4. The request for licensure must be sent to the secretary of the board.
5. The board or its executive committee must interview the applicant.
6. The exhorting of the student must be under the auspices of the school; he must not make his own arrangements.
7. Licensure will be in force while he is a student at school. Extension of licensure must be made by special application. (Acts of Synod 1961, p. 36)



## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 28

**MATTERS LEGALLY BEFORE SYNOD** (adopted by the Synod of 1952 and amended by subsequent synods).

**A. Reports**

Reports of committees, including boards, appointed by previous synods.

**B. Overtures and Communications**

Overtures or communications of individuals or consistories or classes on matters which have been carried as far as possible in the minor assemblies.  
(Acts of Synod 1959, p. 23)

**C. Appeals or Protest**

Appeals or protests of consistories or individual members who cannot yield to classical decisions and who have given notice of such appeals or protests to the classes concerned.

The following rules shall pertain in all matters of appeal and protest *which concern persons*, and not their views on issues and programs.

1. The appellant or protestant shall submit notice and copies of all appeals and protests to the ecclesiastical bodies and/or persons concerned, in time for them to submit their response for consideration by synod.
2. Appeals and protests to synod must be in the hands of the Stated Clerk by March 15. Allowance shall be made, however, for protests and appeals with reference to actions occurring too late to meet this deadline.
3. The appellant and the defendant shall have the right to appear before the advisory committee of synod to be heard, and shall be expected to indicate whether and when they will so appear.
4. The appellant and the defendant shall have the right of hearing the case on the floor of synod and they shall have the privilege of explaining and defending their position on the floor of synod, if synod so decides, upon the recommendation of the advisory committee.
5. The appellant and the defendant shall have the right to be represented by a spokesman.
6. The advisory committee shall present a clear and adequate statement of the content of each appeal to the entire synod.
7. Copies of the protests and appeals not appearing in the Agenda, and, if possible, the principal related documents, shall be sent to the members of the preappointed synodical advisory committee as soon as possible.  
(Acts of Synod 1971 pp. 30, 31)

Note: These rules do not pertain when the Judicial Code has been invoked. In the latter procedure the cases of both the complainant and the respondent must be processed according to the rules for the Judicial Code (See Supplement, Article 30).

**D. Appeals of Rejected Overtures**

Overtures or communications which have failed to gain the endorsement of classis but which the consistory or individual sponsoring the same desire to submit for synod's consideration.

**E. Belated Overtures**

Overtures or communications of individuals when they have been unable first to present them to consistory and classis. Such matters shall be received as information, provided that the Stated Clerk of Synod receives evidence that it was impossible for the communicant to present his matter to consistory and classis. Synod shall decide whether it shall act upon such matters received as information.

**F. Informative Communications**

Synod urges assemblies and members to refrain from overtures, appeals, or communications which are repetitious, or mere expressions of agreement or disagreement with matters already on the agenda of synod.

Synod authorizes the Stated Clerk to omit such items from the printed Agenda at his discretion. In such cases they shall merely be listed and accepted as informative communications. The senders shall be notified and their materials shall be given to one of the advisory committees of synod to be received as information. Matters received as information will not ordinarily be mentioned in advisory committee reports or the Acts of Synod.

(Acts of Synod 1971, p. 46)

**G. Late Reports and Overtures**

No study reports received by the Stated Clerk after February 15 nor overtures received after March 15 shall be considered for decision by synod, with the exception of overtures which deal with matters relevant to reports found in the printed Agenda. Any other overture or study report shall be considered only by special decision of synod on the basis of the most weighty grounds.  
(Acts of Synod 1957, p. 28; 1974, p. 41)

**H. The Printed Agenda**

The Agenda shall be published not later than April 10. It shall include reports of standing or special committees, overtures of classes or consistories, appeals of classes or consistories, notices of appeals of individuals, the names of delegates, and pertinent announcements. All such material shall be in the hands of the Stated Clerk not later than the deadlines: February 15 for the reports of standing committees, study committees and authorized representatives; ten days after conclusion of board meetings for board reports; and March 15 for overtures and appeals.  
(Acts of Synod 1974, p. 41)

### I. Supplementary Reports

The Back to God Hour Committee, the Board of Trustees of Calvin College and Seminary, the Board for Christian Reformed World Missions, the Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions, the Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, and the Synodical Interim Committee are permitted to file a supplementary report after March 15. These boards are urged to incorporate as much of their materials as possible in the printed agenda, and matters for the supplementary reports must be held to the lowest possible minimum.

### J. Other Matters

All other matters may be considered which synod by a majority vote declares acceptable.

### K. Speakers Representing Agencies

Agencies receiving denominational support shall not ordinarily send speakers to synod in view of the fact that these agencies have opportunity to make their needs known through our denominational representatives, may prepare exhibits for synod, may consult advisory committees, and may serve their cause better through appeals directly to our congregations.

(Acts of Synod 1972, p. 14)

### SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 30

#### JUDICIAL CODE OF RIGHTS AND PROCEDURES PREAMBLE TO THE JUDICIAL CODE

The Judicial Code is not a document of broad applicability. It is intended to be operative in a narrow area, and therefore it contains limiting language. It states that its provisions apply *only*:

- a. in a judicial hearing;
- b. when such a judicial hearing is conducted by a consistory, classis, or synod; and
- c. when written charges requiring formal adjudication are filed.

The key provision is the last one: there must be written charges that require formal adjudication. The first determination that must be made by the consistory or other assembly before whom written charges are filed is this: Does this matter require formal adjudication?

In making this determination the consistory or other assembly would ordinarily be in a position to know that spiritual means have or have not been fully utilized. If such means have not been exhausted the assembly should seriously consider postponing the judicial hearing while further informal efforts are employed.

The assembly thus decides whether and when it will hear the matter. The Judicial Code gives guidance: it states that matters of admonition and discipline *do not* require a judicial hearing unless there are written charges which the assembly determines requires formal adjudication.

The Judicial Code thereby gives expression to the fundamental and primary role of spiritual means in all matters of admonition and discipline; it recognizes that these matters are best handled by informal counseling and entreaty; and if sanctions are required, it leaves their determination to the church under the Church Order.



**A. SCOPE****Article 1**

a. These provisions apply to judicial hearing before a consistory, classis or synod occasioned by the bringing of written charges requiring formal adjudication. Such admonition and discipline of the church as does not involve the hearing or written charges requiring formal adjudication are not governed by these provisions.

b. Written charges requiring formal adjudication, whether brought by an individual against an individual or an assembly, or by an assembly against an individual or an assembly, may refer only to alleged offenses in profession or practice against the Word of God, the confessions of the church, or the Church Order.

c. The individual or assembly filing a charge against another individual or assembly shall be called a complainant and the individual or assembly against whom the charge is filed shall be called a respondent.

d. When the assemblies of the church conduct hearings, they act in a judicial capacity.

**B. JUDICIAL RIGHTS****Article 2**

Both the complainant and the respondent, if they are individuals, shall have the right to be represented or counseled by a member of the church in any judicial hearing.

**Article 3**

Both the complainant and the respondent shall have the right to be present at each original hearing and hearing on appeal provided for herein, except when the assembly withdraws to decide the issues raised by the hearing.

**Article 4**

The respondent and complainant shall have the right to have witnesses examined in their presence, except when the respondent fails to appear after due notice.

**Article 5**

A party against whom a judgment is entered shall have the right to appeal that judgment to the assembly next in order.

**C. CHARGES****Article 6**

Every charge, in order to receive a judicial hearing, must be presented to the assembly in writing, must set forth the alleged offense and must specify the facts relied upon to sustain the charge. Such specification shall declare, as far as possible, the time, place and circumstances of the alleged offense and shall be accompanied with the names of the witnesses and the titles of the documents to be cited in its support. A copy of the charge shall be transmitted to the respondent.

**Article 7**

A charge shall not allege more than one offense. Several charges, whether brought by one or more complainants against the same individual or assembly, with the specifications under each of them, may, however, be presented at the same time and may, at the discretion of the assembly, be heard together. When several charges are heard at the same time, a decision on each charge must be made separately.

**Article 8**

a. A hearing for an alleged offense shall begin no later than one year from the time the charge is filed.

b. No charge may be filed for an alleged offense which occurred more than five years prior to the date on which the charge was filed.

**D. ORIGINAL HEARING PROCEDURES BEFORE A CONSISTORY  
ACTING IN ITS JUDICIAL CAPACITY**

**Article 9**

All hearings shall be conducted in a consistent Christian manner. A consistory composed of the elders and deacons, while acting in its judicial capacity, shall be so constituted as to avoid conflicts of interest. The administration of oaths shall not be required.

**Article 10**

The assembly shall in its judicial capacity determine whether the written charges are substantial, requiring formal adjudication. The complainant may appear before the assembly concisely stating his<sup>1</sup> charge and supporting evidence, whereupon the assembly shall determine whether to constitute a formal hearing.

<sup>1</sup> When the pronoun "his" is used herein, it refers either to an assembly or an individual, irrespective of gender.

The hearing, if ordered, shall proceed as follows:

- a. The complainant shall repeat concisely his charge and his supporting evidence. The presiding officer may permit the form of the charge to be amended, but not its content.
- b. The presiding officer shall request the respondent to plead to the charge, and his plea shall be recorded.
- c. If the respondent pleads guilty, the hearing need not to be continued. If the respondent denies the charge, the hearing shall proceed.
- d. The respondent shall state concisely his defense and his supporting evidence.
- e. The complainant shall first produce his evidence and witnesses. The respondent shall then produce his evidence and witnesses. All witnesses may be questioned by both the complainant and the respondent.
- f. The complainant and the respondent shall, in turn, summarize their cases either by oral or written argument.
- g. If either party objects to the regularity of the proceedings, the objection must be entered in the record. The presiding officer may sustain or disallow the objection. In any case he must be sustained by a majority of the consistory.

**Article 11**

If in any case the respondent, after due notice has been given him, shall refuse or neglect to appear at the time and place set forth for the hearing, the investigation or hearing may proceed in his absence. In all cases sufficient time shall be allowed for the respondent to appear at the given place and time and to prepare for the hearing. The consistory shall decide what constitutes "sufficient time."

**Article 12**

The final decision on any case shall be by majority vote of the consistory. Members who have not attended all the sessions and have not heard the case in its entirety shall read the record before a vote is taken.

**Article 13**

During the hearing, the presiding officer shall not comment on the merits of the case. This restriction does not apply when the consistory enters its final deliberations. After a decision has been reached, the presiding officer shall certify and announce the findings.

**Article 14**

The testimony shall be recorded verbatim if requested by any party to the proceedings. The record, including all exhibits, papers, evidence, and findings in the case shall be certified by the presiding officer and shall be the basis of any appeal which may be taken. The appellant and the respondent may have reasonable access to the record.



**E. HEARING AND APPEALS PROCEDURES BEFORE  
A CLASSIS ACTING IN ITS JUDICIAL CAPACITY**

**Article 15**

If a consistory is the respondent, the original hearing shall be before the classis and in accordance with the hearing procedures set forth in Article 10.

**Article 16**

In all cases of appeal to the classis from the consistory, the appellant shall within thirty days after the decision of the consistory give notice of appeal to the stated clerk of classis and to the consistory whose decision is appealed. Within the next thirty days, or such extension as the classis may authorize, the appellant shall furnish to the stated clerk of classis a written statement of the grounds of his appeal. The clerk of the consistory shall thereupon forward to the stated clerk the record referred to in Article 14. The hearing in the classis shall be limited to the grounds set forth in the statement and record.

**Article 17**

An appeal by an involved party shall not be heard in any case when the appellant has without just cause failed or refused to be present at his hearing on appeal.

**Article 18**

The right to appeal shall not be affected by the death of the person entitled to such right. His heirs or representative may continue to act in his behalf.

**Article 19**

If the appellant, having shown good cause therefore, desires to introduce additional evidence, the classis may remand the case to the consistory for a rehearing.

**Article 20**

In all cases the classis shall set a time for the hearing on appeal and send a notice as to the time and date of such hearing to all parties. After the statement and record have been considered and oral arguments concluded, the classis shall withdraw and shall hereupon consider and decide the issues of the case. The final decision on any case shall be by majority vote of the classis. Delegates who have not attended all the sessions and have not heard the case in its entirety shall read the record before a vote is taken. The classis may sustain or reverse in whole or in part the decision of the consistory, or it may return the case to the consistory with instructions for a new hearing.

**Article 21**

Appeal of the decision of classis may be made to synod. Such an appeal must be made within thirty days. When such an appeal is made a written notice together with a statement of grounds of appeal shall be sent to the stated clerk of synod and a copy thereof to the stated clerk of classis. The stated clerk of such classis shall thereupon transmit the decision of classis together with the record and papers of the case to the Stated Clerk of Synod, who will place the appeal on the Agenda for Synod.

**F. HEARING AND APPEAL PROCEDURES BEFORE THE  
SYNOD ACTING IN ITS JUDICIAL CAPACITY**

**Article 22**

Appeal of decisions of assemblies of the church acting in their judicial capacity, and such other matters requiring formal adjudication as synod shall undertake, shall be referred to the Synodical Advisory Committee on Protests and Appeals for consideration and advice.

**Article 23**

- a. The Protests and Appeals Committee advising a given synod shall be appointed by the preceding synod. Approximately half the members shall be lay persons.
- b. Any member of the Protests and Appeals Committee advising a given synod may be, but need not be, a delegate to that synod.

**Article 24**

- a. Matters within the jurisdiction of the Protests and Appeals Committee shall be referred to it at any time after its members have been appointed.
- b. The Protests and Appeals Committee shall meet between synods as frequently as its business requires, and normally shall convene a week before synod to prepare its recommendations.
- c. As to appeals from decisions of consistories and classes, the Protests and Appeals Committee shall permit complainants and respondents to present arguments.
- d. As to other matters requiring formal adjudication which synod shall undertake, the Protests and Appeals Committee shall follow the hearing procedures described herein.

**Article 25**

Recommendation of the Protests and Appeals Committee shall be presented to the synod in writing, shall be accompanied with grounds, and shall be openly discussed in plenary session of synod.

**Article 26**

Synod may dispose of a judicial matter in one of the following ways:

- a. By deciding the matter;
- b. By deferring it to one of its committees for settlement or reconciliation;
- c. By remanding it with advice to the appropriate classis or consistory; or
- d. By conducting its own hearing.

**Article 27**

If synod conducts its own hearing it shall follow the hearing procedures set forth herein.

Synod adopted the following grounds for the Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures:

- a. The Judicial Code will encourage greater uniformity of procedure throughout our denomination when charges must be adjudicated.
- b. The Judicial Code will help to insure just treatment of those who are involved in the judgments and decisions of the church.
- c. Scripture requires that provisions be made to provide impartial judgments among God's people. (cf. Deut. 1:16, 17; Deut. 16:18-20; Lev. 19:15; I Tim. 5:19-21)
- d. Article 28 of the Church Order requires that the assemblies of the church deal with ecclesiastical matters in an ecclesiastical manner. Without effective procedural guidelines it is often difficult to deal with substantive issues in an appropriate manner.
- e. The Judicial Code provides a procedural pattern within which the law of love may be fulfilled (cf. James 2:1, 8, 9). "My brethren, show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory." "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well. But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." (RSV)

(Acts of Synod 1977, pp. 48-54)

**SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 67****RULES FOR LAPSED MEMBERSHIP**

1. Synod declares that baptized or confessing members who move away from the area of their church so that a meaningful church relationship is no longer possible, may retain their membership in their home church at their request and with the consent of the consistory. If they fail to make such a request, and do not transfer to a church near them, the consistory, having made serious attempts to rectify the situation, may declare their membership lapsed after a period of two years from the date of their departure. The member concerned shall be notified by the consistory of its action if at all possible. This rule shall not apply to those whose absence from their home is temporary.

*Grounds:*

- a. This recommendation removes the inconsistency between the decisions of synod in 1881 and 1910.
  - b. The primary responsibility for church membership rests with the members, but this does not exclude a certain responsibility of the home church and its consistory.
  - c. The lapsing of membership should be by the action of the consistory in each individual case and not by automatic application of a rule, if proper pastoral work is to be carried out.
  - d. No delinquency should be assumed on the part of those who are absent from their home church temporarily, as for reasons of education, military service or comparable circumstances.
  - e. Pastoral concern for the well-being of the members warrants extending the time element from one year and six weeks to two years.
2. This regulation shall supersede the rules of 1881 and 1910.

(Acts of Synod 1974, p. 81 f)



## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 68

## RULES FOR LAPSING OF NON-ATTENDING AND NON-SUPPORTING MEMBERS

Synod decided that with respect to a baptized or confessing member who, for a period of at least two years, has not moved but fails to attend and support the congregation that holds his membership, the consistory may declare that his membership has lapsed. This may be done when all the following conditions are present:

- a. He claims to be still committed to the Christian faith.
- b. He claims to be worshipping elsewhere.
- c. The consistory is not aware of any public sin requiring discipline.

*Grounds:*

- a. Since membership involves both rights and obligations, the right of membership may be forfeited when the obligations of membership in a local congregation are refused.
- b. After an adequate period during which the elders instruct the member in his responsibilities as a member of the congregation, his membership has become meaningless, and the action of declaring the membership lapsed is simply an acknowledgment of an already existing rupture between the member and the congregation.
- c. This provision has become necessary because of the increasing trend on the part of many churches and fellowships to ignore or reject the significance of membership in the visible church.
- d. This is consistent with the decision of synod that one who has separated himself from the fellowship of the congregation by moving away and takes no action to become a member of another church also may lose his membership by consistorial action.
- e. This will assist consistories, who at present face the alternative of taking no effective action with such a member or proceeding to erase or excommunicate him from the body of Christ, by providing a way of removing his name from the membership rolls without being required to pass judgment on his relationship to the church universal.

Appropriate announcements shall be made by the consistory to the congregation regarding such lapsed memberships and the person involved shall be notified. (Acts of Synod 1976, p. 25)

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 76

The synodical regulations referred to in Article 76 may be found in the *Mission Order* of the Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions.

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 77

The synodical regulations referred to in Article 77 may be found in the *Mission Order* of the Board for Christian Reformed World Missions.

## SUPPLEMENT, ARTICLE 83

## UNFAITHFUL MEMBERS-BY-BAPTISM

1. Baptized members having reached the years of maturity, but having failed to make profession of faith—aside from their conduct of life in other respects—being unfaithful covenant members, become the objects of ecclesiastical discipline, and when they persist in their sin, should be excluded from the church.
2. When such unfaithful covenant members move elsewhere, they should not be given a certificate, but at best a testimony of baptism with a notation as to their conduct.
3. Before a consistory proceeds to exclude unfaithful covenant members,
  - a. an announcement, ordinarily without mentioning names, shall be made to the congregation with a request for prayer on behalf of them,
  - b. and thereupon the advice of classis shall be asked,
  - c. after the advice of classis has been received and before the final announcement of exclusion from the church is made, another request for the prayers of the congregation be made, this time mentioning their names. (As amended, Acts of Synod 1974, p. 110)
4. The exclusion of unfaithful covenant members is to take place by officially informing the congregation, and notifying the parties involved that they, due to their persistent unfaithfulness as covenant members, notwithstanding all ecclesiastical admonitions, will henceforth not be regarded as belonging to the church.
5. Excluded unfaithful covenant members who return with sorrow and repentance, cannot be received back into the church except through profession of faith, while the consistory judges concerning every individual case whether or not a separate confession of sin shall be required. (Acts of Synod 1918, pp. 58, 180)