CHURCH ORDER AND ITS SUPPLEMENTS

Responding to God's *gracious call*.

2018

Christian Reformed Church

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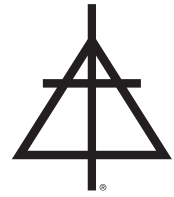
2018



Christian Reformed Church

This booklet is prepared by the Christian Reformed Church and incorporates revisions, printed in italics, to be considered for adoption by Synod 2019.

The Rules for Synodical Procedure may be accessed on the CRC website at www.crcna.org/SynodResources.

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1700 28th St. SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49508

Printed in the United States of America.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome, readers! You have discovered an important document for the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA)— the *Church Order and Its Supplements*! The title is not so exciting—perhaps it should be called "A Tool Churches Cannot Live Without." The fact is that this is an important booklet, one that church leaders will want to be familiar with in order to function well in their congregations and classes (regional groups of churches) and at synod (the denomination's annual assembly). Other interested individuals can learn about the Christian Reformed Church through this booklet as well.

So, What Is the Church Order?

The Church Order is a document that shows how the congregations of the Christian Reformed Church in North America have decided to live together and to organize themselves. It is a tool for effective leadership, in that leaders need to know the regulations and parameters of the organization in which they are working so that they can apply them in a variety of situations.

More than a contractual set of regulations or simply guidelines, the Church Order is really a record of our covenanting together within this denominational fellowship. As leaders and members and congregations in the CRCNA, we promise to use these regulations to order our life together as a particular part of the body of Christ. And that covenant commitment is based on our belief that Christ is the head of the church and we, as Christ's body, must reflect Christ in how we function, choose leaders, assemble, deliberate over issues, carry out the ministries and mission of the church, and hold one another accountable for all these things.

We agree to abide by these promises and to work together to change the regulations when necessary. It's important to remember that the Church Order is a document of the churches, and what it says and how it changes is determined by the churches together. It's our book; in a sense, we all are its authors. And as our denomination becomes more diverse, the Church Order helps to build unity by establishing normative patterns even as it encompasses many different churches in varying local contexts.

Just as books come in different genres, and the Bible in particular contains writing in many different genres, the Church Order also reflects a particular genre. In a sense it may be compared to the Proverbs of Scripture as *wisdom literature*. The collective wisdom of the church is contained in these articles and is passed on from generation to generation. The articles of the Church Order are meant to help the church function in healthy and wise ways.

Designed for Change

Part of being wise about how to live together and function in healthy ways is being able to adjust to changes in the church and in our culture.

When the churches discern together by the Holy Spirit's guidance that the Church Order needs to change, they discuss and make these decisions together. The normal process is for a church council to send a request for a change by way of an overture which is sent to the classis, and then on to synod. Each step of the way involves more leaders of the church, bearers of the office of Christ who are trying to discern what is fitting for how God calls us to live together, and fitting for how our churches function in the world today.

So the Church Order is intended to change from time to time, and those changes are made by the broadest assembly of the denomination. What's more, substantial changes need to be communicated to all the churches for feedback before they even go to a synod. If that has not happened, any changes must be approved by a subsequent synod before they take effect. So while we are certainly open to change, we are careful about it, to make sure we hear all the important voices involved.

All this is in keeping with the Scripture verse quoted in Article 1 of the Church Order, "Everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." This statement in 1 Corinthians 14:40 rises out of a concern about disorder in worship, but it also highlights a New Testament principle that Christians are to behave in ways that are fitting for followers of Christ. The Church Order applies that principle to the organization of the church and the checks and balances that seek to ensure that fittingness.

Our commitment to change and adjust our practices comes from one of the theological fathers of our church, John Calvin, who wrote,

> But because [our Lord] did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do (because he foresaw that this depended upon the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages), here we must take refuge in those general rules which he has given, that whatever the necessity of the church will require for order and decorum should be tested against these. Lastly, because he has taught nothing specifically, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting (as the advantage of the church will require) to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones. Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause. But love will best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe (*Institutes,* IV.X.30).

Calvin certainly believed in good order in the church for healthy and peaceful functioning, but he also argued that there should be as few rules as necessary, allowing for maximum flexibility. And, most important, he called us to the rule of loving one another as we make decisions in these matters.

Important Distinctions

It is very important for readers to distinguish between the Church Order, the Church Order Supplements, and the Rules for Synodical Procedure (published separately).

The **Church Order** is a list of articles that regulate the organization and activities of the church, which are organized under four main headings—the offices, assemblies, task and activities, and admonition and discipline of the church.

The **Church Order Supplements** are decisions that a particular synod judged were significant enough to accompany the Church Order so that the churches are aware of them.

The **Rules for Synodical Procedure** are an outline for the functioning of the annual synod of the Christian Reformed Church—its constitution, tasks and duties, and the rules of order used in its meetings—and are available on the CRC website.

Many more decisions have been made throughout the years and can be found in the *Acts of Synod*, which is published annually. All can be found online at www.crcna.org. A listing of particular positions of the CRC on various ethical and theological matters can also be found on that website.

Reformed Church Polity

Church polity refers to the form of governance and organization of a church. The CRCNA follows a Presbyterian form of church polity organized under governance by elders, as compared to Episcopal polities organized under governance by bishops (Roman Catholic, United Methodist, and Episcopal denominations) and Congregational polities organized under the governance of the local congregation (Congregational, Baptist, Disciples of Christ). Some of these congregational polities do allow for greater associations and connections between churches.

Governance by elders is assumed throughout the Christian Reformed Church Order, but please note that CRCNA polity is not exactly like that of Presbyterian denominations. Two particular differences include the fact that we have limited tenure for officebearers (so elders and deacons serve *terms*, not *forever*), and ministers' credentials are held at the local council level, not at the regional (classical) level, as in many Presbyterian and Reformed denominations. Another key difference is that church polity in the CRCNA does not have confessional status and, therefore, the Church Order does not have the same authority as the creeds. The Church Order is subordinate to the creeds and confessions, which are subordinate to Scripture.

New Format

In 2009-2010 a task force worked at updating the Church Order to eliminate some inconsistencies that had developed over the years, but synods update the Church Order almost every year as changes are made in our ever-reforming context. The formatting of this booklet is intended to make the Church Order and its Supplements more readable and accessible for use.

For further reflection on the Church Order and its Supplements, please refer to the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*, authored by Dr. Peter Borgdorff and updated annually or as needed—available in the digital library (crcna.org/Library).

May God bless you as you serve in Christ's church in a fitting and orderly way!

CHURCH ORDER AND ITS SUPPLEMENTS

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 officebearers are "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph. 4:12), and to do so "in a fitting and orderly way" (1 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 church recognizes the offices of minister of the Word, elder, deacon, and commissioned pastor. These offices differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor.

Article 3

a. All adult confessing members of the church who meet the biblical requirements are eligible for the offices of minister, elder, deacon, and commissioned pastor.

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

—Cf. Supplement, Articles 3-a, 45, and 48-a

Supplement, Article 3-a

Regulations

1. a. All congregations may, but will not be required to, allow women to serve in the office of minister, elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor.

b. Classes may, in keeping with their understanding of the biblical position on the role of women in ecclesiastical office, declare that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors) may not be delegated to classis.

c. All duly elected and ordained officebearers may be delegated to synod. Officebearers shall not be asked to participate against their convictions.

2. Synodical deputies shall not be asked to participate against their conviction in any matter relating to ministers of the Word as provided in Articles 6-18 and 82-84 of the Church Order.

3. Every classis shall respect the prerogative of its constituent churches to call and ordain officebearers according to their own biblical convictions. No members of classis shall be required to participate against their convictions in a candidate's examination or in processing ministerial credentials. The examination for ordination of a female candidate may then be conducted by a *classis contracta* consisting of delegates from churches that do not object. In the event that a quorum cannot be found, representatives from churches in a neighboring classis may be invited to achieve the equivalent of a quorum.

4. Women ministers may not be approved for fields of labor outside North America where our partner churches do not permit the ordination of women.

5. In the consideration of applications submitted by qualified women for candidacy for the office of minister of the Word, both the Candidacy Committee and synod shall ensure that trustees and delegates will not be forced to participate against their convictions. In the declaration of candidacy delegates may exercise their right to abstain from voting.

6. The executive director shall maintain a list of classes that have declared that women officebearers (ministers, elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors) may not be delegated to classis.

(*Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 610-12)

Article 4

a. In calling and electing to an office, the council shall ordinarily present to the congregation a nomination of at least twice the number to be elected. When the council submits a nomination which totals less than twice the number to be elected, it shall give reasons for doing so.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 4-a

b. Prior to making nominations the council may give the congregation an opportunity to direct attention to suitably gifted persons.

c. The election by the congregation shall take place under the supervision of the council after prayer and in accordance with the regulations

established by the council. Adult confessing members in good standing shall have the right to vote.

d. After having called the elected persons to their respective offices and having announced their names, the council 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.

Supplement, Article 4-a

Modification for Churches of Classis Red Mesa

In calling to an office, the council shall present to the congregation a nomination of one or more persons for each position to be filled.

(*Acts of Synod 1983*, p. 660)

Use of Lot in Elections

The use of the lot in the election of officebearers is permitted when a congregational vote is part of the process.

(*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 609)

Article 5

All officebearers, on occasions stipulated by council, classical, and synodical regulations, shall signify their agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 5

***Supplement, Article 5**

Covenant for Officebearers

We, [the undersigned], believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, which proclaims the good news of God's creation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

We affirm three creeds—the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed—as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, we confess our faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and among all nations.

We also affirm three confessions—the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. These confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.

Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God's Word, we will communicate our views to the church, according to the procedures prescribed by the Church Order and its supplements. If the church asks, we will give a full explanation of our views. Further, we promise to submit to the church's judgment and authority.

We honor this covenant for the well-being of the church to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 761-62)

*To be signed by professors, ministers, commissioned pastors, elders, and deacons when ordained and/or installed in office.

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 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 affirming the confessions by means of the Covenant for Officebearers:

1. The person signing the Covenant for Officebearers affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God.
2. The signatory does not by affirming the confessions 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 the signatory 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 signatory is bound only to those doctrines that 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 that some may draw from the doctrines set forth in the confessions. However, no one is free to decide for oneself 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" to their councils for examination and judgment. Should a council 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 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 affirmation of the Covenant for Officebearers is that the doctrines contained in the confessions of the church fully agree with the Word of God. The burden of proof, therefore, rests upon the signatory who calls upon the church to justify or revise its confessions.

2. Ministers (including missionaries, professors, or others not serving congregations as pastors), elders, or deacons shall submit their gravamina calling for revision of the confessions to their councils for examination and judgment. Should the council 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 Church Order Article 28-b.

3. If the gravamen is adopted by the council 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 Covenant for Officebearers 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 council 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 officebearer, provided other provisions of 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.

(*Acts of Synod 2012*, pp. 762-65)

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 synod 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 synod to be candidates for the ministry of the Word.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 6

Supplement, Article 6

A. Students having studied theology at other than Calvin Theological Seminary shall complete the prescribed requirements of the Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (EPMC) before they shall be declared eligible for call in our churches.

(*Acts of Synod 1924*, p. 38)

B. Students shall be declared candidates by synod after being interviewed by the Candidacy Committee. Recommendations

regarding academic qualifications, doctrinal soundness, spiritual fitness, and personality are to be presented to the Candidacy Committee by the Calvin Theological Seminary faculty.

(*Acts of Synod 1961*, p. 55)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2004*, 619-20)

C. Regulations for declaring candidacy between the annual synods

1. Applications for candidacy may be made by students who anticipate having a combination of four or fewer uncompleted units in their seminary program as of the meeting of the synod at which they will be declared a candidate. Each course and internship would be considered a "unit" for purposes of this calculation.
2. Synod may declare such students to be candidates contingent upon completion of all remaining requirements.
3. When a student completes all remaining requirements, the Candidacy Committee shall announce the candidate's eligibility for call.
4. Any student who does not complete the remaining requirements by March 1 must reapply for candidacy to the Candidacy Committee.
5. Any such candidate who has not received and accepted a call to one of our churches and desires to continue eligibility for candidacy must make application the Candidacy Committee by May 15.

(*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 111)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2004*, pp. 619-20)
(See also Supplement, Article 10)

D. When voting to declare candidates for the ministry of the Word, synod shall vote on the candidates as a group.

(*Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 639)

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.

b. Those preparing for the ordained ministry under the provisions of this article are required to complete the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC).

—Cf. Supplement, Article 7

Supplement, Article 7

A. Eligibility for Call by Way of Article 7

1. If anyone wishes to be admitted to the ministry of the Word in accordance with Article 7, the procedure described in "The Journey to Ministry: Article 7" available from the Candidacy Committee and online at www.crcna.org/candidacy must be carefully followed. The home classis of the applicant will examine the candidate in the presence of synodical deputies when a favorable recommendation from the Candidacy Committee has been received. In addition to meeting the high standards of Church Order Article 7, a person who seeks to be ordained as a minister of the Word by way of Article 7 must also do so in the context of a particular congregation's desire and commitment to call that person to serve as minister of the Word.
2. The classical exam for an Article 7 applicant shall include 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, the applicant shall be declared eligible for a call.
4. When the candidate receives and accepts a call, a pre-ordination exam shall be administered, in the presence of synodical deputies, by the home classis of the calling church. This exam shall be in accordance with existing regulations, excepting the ancient languages.

(*Agenda 1920*, pp. 26-27; *Acts of Synod 1922*, pp. 72-73)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 581)

B. Declarations re Admittance by Way of Article 7

The Candidacy Committee, in determining the suitability of an applicant for ordination by way of Article 7, shall be guided by the following criteria:

1. The "gifts" mentioned in Article 7 should be possessed by an applicant in a very exceptional measure. No one should be considered unless the applicant has extraordinary qualities.
2. Not only the qualifications mentioned in Article 7 should be considered but such an applicant should also possess exceptional knowledge of the Word, knowledge of spiritual needs, and native ability to apply the Word.
3. This article should never be used as a means to ordain 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.

(Adapted from the *Acts of Synod 1947*, p. 94)

C. Special Advice for Classis Red Mesa

1. That the following be the method by which the ordination of native workers is to be effected:
   a. That capable persons, 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 council, the classis, and the Candidacy Committee.
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 council and the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team concerning the required qualifications stated in Article 7 are to be forwarded to the Candidacy Committee.
   b. Upon receipt of application, together with the recommendation of the council and the Classis Ministerial Leadership Team, the Candidacy Committee shall determine whether it considers the applicant eligible for further consideration to become ordained under Article 7.
   c. If the preliminary judgment is favorable, the Candidacy Committee is authorized to issue the applicant a preaching license so that the applicant can preach at several of the churches in the classis.
   d. All other procedures of the Candidacy Committee (as approved by Synod 2006) shall apply.
   e. The examination for ordination follows later according to existing rules, except in the classical languages.

(Adapted from *Acts of Synod 1958*, pp. 87-88)
(*Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 663)

Article 8

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

b. Ministers of the Reformed Church in America are eligible for call to serve in the Christian Reformed Church, with due observance of the relevant rules.

c. Ministers of other denominations desiring to become ministers in the Christian Reformed Church shall be required to complete the Modified Ecclesiastical Program for Ministerial Candidacy (MEPMC).

d. 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

Supplement, Article 8

A. *Nominating Ministers Who Have Served Their Present Churches Less Than Two Years*

The synod judges that councils 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 the present church less than two years, the counselor shall give an 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 for a Specified Term of Service*

1. If the letter of call designates a specific term, the letter shall also include a statement concerning the possibility and method for reappointment and the financial arrangements which will be made in the event that the appointment is not extended beyond the specified term.
2. The church's counselor, on behalf of classis, shall make sure the termination procedures and arrangements stated in a letter of call are fair and reasonable.
3. When a call is terminated following the procedure agreed to in the letter of call, the minister shall be eligible for a call for a period of two years, after which time the classis, with the concurring

advice of the synodical deputies, shall declare the minister to be released from the ministerial office. For valid reasons the classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, may extend the minister's eligibility for call on a yearly basis.

(*Acts of Synod 1987*, p. 575)

4. When a term call is extended to a candidate, it shall ordinarily include a term of service of not less than two years.

(*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 712)

D. *Calling Ministers from the Reformed Church in America*

1. A church may call a minister of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) with due observance of the relevant rules that govern the Orderly Exchange of Ordained Ministers (Cf. *Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 741). This shall apply only to a church that continues to have a viable ministry.
2. Orderly exchange is intended for ordained ministers of the other denomination to engage in extended service with an indefinite or long-term call in a church (the inviting church) while remaining a member of their own church that holds their ministerial credentials.
3. An ordained minister of the CRC, in good standing, is eligible to engage in extended service (a call) in the RCA and an ordained minister of the RCA, in good standing, is eligible to engage in extended service (a call) in the CRC.
4. Extended service is understood to mean that an ordained minister of the CRC may be invited to serve as a minister of an RCA congregation for an extended period of time while maintaining status as an ordained minister of the CRC, and, vice versa, a minister of the RCA may be invited to serve as a minister of a CRC congregation for an extended period of time while maintaining status as an ordained minister of the RCA. Such a person would preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in a manner consistent with the polity of the inviting church.
5. Orderly exchange allows an ordained minister to express the desire, through appropriate channels, to serve in another denomination as an ecumenical witness. However, orderly exchange is always at the invitation of the inviting church and subject to that church's polity.
6. To be able to serve in another church, an ordained minister will demonstrate to the appropriate body of the inviting church a knowledge of and appreciation for the theological and liturgical identity, history, polity, and discipline of the church.
7. Approval for extended service must be done in consultation with and with the concurrence of the sending body. (In the CRC, the

sending body is the calling church council; in the RCA, it is the classis holding the pastor's membership.) The minister remains accountable to the sending body for continuation of ministerial status. In the event of termination of a call, the polity of the calling church shall be followed, in consultation with the sending church.

(*Acts of Synod 2014*, pp. 564-65)

8. Responsibility for the pastoral care of ordained ministers and their families is to be initiated by the served congregation, which will also inform both the sending and inviting bodies of the CRC and the RCA, which will then share in that pastoral care.
9. The ordained minister is subject to the supervision of the sending body with regard to matters of discipline. The inviting body shall have oversight of the congregation in which the minister serves. Both the inviting and sending bodies shall be in communication and participate as appropriate.
10. Each church will make provision for an ordained minister's being granted participation in the appropriate bodies of the church in which he/she is serving (the inviting church). (Cf. Article 38-g and its Supplement.)
11. All ordained ministers shall continue to participate in the pension and benefits program of the denomination that holds their ministerial credentials (the sending church). The inviting church has the obligation to cover the pension and benefit costs. (Cf. Article 38-g and its Supplement.)

(*Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 741-42)

12. It is important to the faithful and orderly exchange of ordained ministers that one who would serve in a congregation of another church first be formed and educated for ministry in one's own tradition and have experience in serving in that church's ordained ministry. Such experience and grounding in one's own tradition are seen to be essential prior to serving in a setting of another tradition; therefore, such service is not intended for a first call.

(*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 824)

E. Calling Ministers from Other Denominations

1. A church may consider calling a minister of another denomination only if it has put forth a sustained and realistic effort to obtain a minister from within the Christian Reformed Church or the Reformed Church in America. This shall apply only to a church which continues to have a viable ministry.

(*Acts of Synod 2005*, p. 742)

2. A minister of another denomination desiring to be declared eligible for a call to a Christian Reformed church shall make application to the Candidacy Committee. Once the application

has been filed, the procedures prescribed by the Candidacy Committee in the "Journey Toward Ordination" document shall be followed.

3. A council shall not nominate a minister from another denomination for a call without the approval of its classis and the Candidacy Committee.
4. The need for calling a minister of another denomination shall be acknowledged when:
   a. The minister to be called has such extraordinary qualifications that the church recognizes that it would be important for the denomination to acquire the minister's service, or,
   b. The need of a particular congregation for a pastor is so urgent that it can be met only by calling a minister from another denomination, or,
   c. The minister is a new-church developer and is being called to start a new church, or
   d. There is a need for indigenous leadership in a multicultural or ethnic minority church.
5. At the scheduled colloquium doctum, the applicant or nominee shall present a testimonial from the council or classis or presbytery by the Candidacy Committee, concerning the applicant's or nominee's purity of doctrine and sanctity of life.

   (It is conceivable that just because the applicant is loyal to the Word and the creeds that the minister is adjudged *persona non grata* by their own ecclesiastical assemblies and that the minister 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.)
6. The following criteria shall be applied for approving or disapproving the proposed nominee or applicant:
   a. soundness of doctrine
   b. sanctity of life
   c. knowledge and appreciation of Christian Reformed practice and usage
7. When ministers from other countries are being proposed for nomination or request an examination to be made eligible for call, the Candidacy Committee shall use the following additional criteria:
   a. ability to speak, or learn, the English language
   b. ability to adjust to the American/Canadian situation
   c. age limit of forty years (as a general rule)

8. The proposed nominee or applicant, having sustained the examination and having received the approbation of the synodical deputies, may now be called or declared eligible for call, as the case may be. No further examination or colloquium doctum will be required.

(Adapted from *Acts of Synod 1984*, pp. 642-43)

Note: The following new sections E, 4 and 5 (in *italics*) to replace sections E, 4 through 8 above will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

4. *At the completion of the affiliation process the classis, with permission from the Candidacy Committee, shall conduct a colloquium doctum inquiring into the applicant's soundness of doctrine, sanctity of life, and knowledge and appreciation of Christian Reformed practice and usage. Synodical deputies must be present, and a successful examination will require the approval of classis and the concurrence of the synodical deputies.*
5. *The* approved nominee or applicant *may now be called or declared eligibile for call, as the case may be. No further examination or colloquium doctum will be required.*

(Adapted from Acts of Synod 1984, *pp. 642-43)*

F. *Determination of Need*

1. Synod directs the Candidacy Committee to take specific and special note of the "need" factor when requested to give their advice to the councils and/or classes in the calling of ministers from other denominations and in declaring ministers from other denominations available for call in the Christian Reformed Church at their own request.
2. Synod requires of the councils and/or classes such written specification of the "need" for approving such ministers and their calling as will satisfy the Candidacy Committee in their decision, which written specification shall then become part of the report of the Candidacy Committee to be submitted for synodical approval.

Note: The following new section F, 2 (in *italics*) will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

2. *Synod calls all parties concerned to review the criteria for "need" offered in the "Journey Toward Ordination" document at crcna.org.*

G. *Joint Ministry of Ministers from Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship*

Ministers of denominations in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church may be called by way of exception to serve in the Christian Reformed Church while jointly serving

ministries within their own denominations. This arrangement requires the approval of classis and the concurrence of the synodical deputies. The specific need for their services must be demonstrated and the pension fund arrangements must be satisfactorily met in the denomination holding the minister's credentials.

Ministers of denominations in ecclesiastical fellowship who so serve churches in the Christian Reformed Church will be accorded the right of delegation to classis and participation in classical committee work for the duration of their time of service in the Christian Reformed Church. This right of delegation and participation shall not extend beyond the boundaries of the classis.

The Christian Reformed Church will by way of exception allow its ministers to be called by a congregation of a denomination in ecclesiastical fellowship if such a minister jointly serves in a congregation of the denomination in ecclesiastical fellowship and in a congregation of the Christian Reformed Church.

(*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 663)

Article 9

In nominating and calling a minister, the council shall seek the approval of the counselor who acts on behalf of classis to see that the ecclesiastical regulations have been observed. The council and counselor shall sign the letter of call and the counselor shall render an account of all matters processed 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 the candidate concerning the candidate's 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 provided by the former council and classis.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 10

Supplement, Article 10

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.

2. The date of ordination shall be officially announced only after the candidate has passed the examination.
3. 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 calling church.
4. A copy of the candidate's sermon shall be provided by classis to the synodical deputies and to the delegates to classis.
5. 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 were 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 and the New Testament. These sermons shall not include those which have been used in practice preaching, or for academic evaluation, in the seminary.

(*Acts of Synod 1975*, p. 90)

6. Synod advises the classes, with reference to the credentials required by classes, that synod's declaration of candidacy may be taken to certify that the candidates have met the requirements for candidacy. No further inquiry into these matters need ordinarily be made by a classis at the examination for ordination.

(*Acts of Synod 1978*, p. 24)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 583)

7. 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.
8. 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:
      1) *Practica* (no time limit)
         a) The classical examiner shall inquire into the candidate's relationship to God and commitment to the ministry, the candidate's understanding of the meaning and relevance of the ministry for our times, loyalty to the church, and related matters.
         b) The synodical deputies and delegates shall have opportunity to ask additional questions.

c) Before proceeding to the next area of inquiry, a motion to proceed shall carry.

2) *Sermon Evaluation*

a) In the presence of the candidate, the written sermon shall be evaluated, and attention shall be given to the candidate's manner of conducting a worship service.

b) Additional questions with reference to the sermon and its delivery shall be allowed.

c) Before proceeding to the next area, a motion to proceed shall carry with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.

3) *Biblical and Theological Position* (minimum, thirty minutes per candidate)

a) The examiner shall inquire into the candidate's biblical and theological judgment, competence, and soundness.

b) 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.

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

Article 11

The calling of a minister of the Word is to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and equip the members so that the church of Jesus Christ may be built up.

Article 12

a. A minister of the Word serving as pastor of a congregation shall preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship services, catechize the youth, and train members for Christian service. The minister, with other officebearers, shall supervise the congregation

and fellow officebearers, exercise admonition and discipline, see to it that everything is done decently and in order, exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism and diaconal outreach.

b. A minister of the Word who (1) enters into the work of missions, chaplaincy, or specialized transitional ministry; or (2) is appointed directly by synod; or (3) whose appointment is ratified by synod shall be called in the regular manner by a local church, which acts in cooperation with the appropriate committees of classis or synod.

c. A minister of the Word may also serve the church in other work which relates directly to the calling of a minister, but only after the calling church has demonstrated to the satisfaction of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, that said work is consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 12-c

Supplement, Article 12-c

Regulations for the application of Article 12-c of the Church Order to specific tasks and situations:

a. The calling church shall secure the prior approval of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, for each new ministerial position, by providing classis with the following information:
   1) The description of the official position (purposes, duties, qualifications, etc.) as determined by the calling church in consultation with cooperating agencies as applicable.
   2) The evidence that the minister will be directly accountable to the calling church, including an outline of requirements for reporting to the calling church, and supervision by the calling church, in consultation with cooperating agencies as applicable.
   3) The demonstration that the position will be consistent with the calling as a minister of the Word.
   4) When any position having been declared by a classis to be "spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling" . . . becomes vacant, this position shall be reviewed in light of Articles 11-14 of the Church Order before another call is issued.

b. When a new ministry opportunity can be met only by immediate action, the calling church (and the appropriate denominational agency) may obtain provisional approval from the classical committee, subject to subsequent approval by classis with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies. In the event that the provisional approval is not

sustained and the minister desires to continue in the position, the minister may be honorably released from office and may be readmitted according to the regulations of the Church Order. (Cf. Article 14-e.)

c. Prior to calling a minister of the Word to any chaplaincy ministry, the calling church also is required to obtain the endorsement of the Office of Chaplaincy Ministries of the Christian Reformed Church (*Acts of Synod 1973*, p. 56; amended *Acts of Synod 1998*, p. 391).

d. The church visitors of classis shall inquire annually into the supervision of the calling church toward said minister(s) as well as the reporting of said minister(s) to the calling church. The church visitors shall inform classis of departure from the approved provisions for supervision and reporting.

(*Acts of Synod 1978*, pp. 47-48)

Article 13

a. A minister of the Word serving as pastor of a congregation is directly accountable to the calling church, and therefore shall be supervised in doctrine, life, and duties by that church.

b. A minister of the Word whose work is with other than the calling church shall be supervised by the calling church in cooperation with other congregations, institutions, or agencies involved. The council of the calling church shall have primary responsibility for supervision of doctrine and life. The congregations, institutions, or agencies, where applicable, shall have primary responsibility for supervision of duties.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 13-b

c. A minister of the Word may be loaned temporarily by the calling church to serve as pastor of a congregation outside of the Christian Reformed Church, but only with the approval of classis, the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with the synodical regulations. Although the specific duties may be regulated in cooperation with the other congregation, the supervision of doctrine and life rests with the calling church.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 13-c

Supplement, Article 13-b

If any council, agency, or institution of the CRC involved in the cooperative supervision of a minister of the Word learns about significant deviation in doctrine, life, or duties, it shall officially inform in writing its partner(s) in that supervision about such deviation before any action is taken that affects that minister's status and future. A

similar communication officially informing its partner(s) in supervision is expected from an agency or institution when a minister's status is altered at a time of downsizing or position elimination.

Provisions for cooperative supervision of ministers of the Word working for agencies and institutions not directly under the authority of the synod of the CRCNA are to be formulated and processed according to the regulations contained in Church Order Supplement, Article 12-c and the provisions regarding chaplains adopted by Synod 1998 (see *Acts of Synod 1998*, pp. 391-92, 457-60).

The credentials of a minister of the Word serving in specialized ministry (e.g., chaplaincy) may be sent to another church when such a change makes supervision of a minister's doctrine and life easier and/or more effective. Transfer of ministerial credentials requires the regular calling process of the local church and must be approved by both councils and classes.

(*Acts of Synod 2002*, pp. 469-70)
(*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 624)

Supplement, Article 13-c

Regulations Pertaining to Article 13-c of the Church Order

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

a. The congregation seeking the services of the Christian Reformed minister is desirous of the Reformed faith and seriously contemplates affiliation with the Christian Reformed Church 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 a nondenominational church acknowledges this as an opportunity to encourage such a church to affiliate with either the Christian Reformed Church or a Reformed denomination similar to the Christian Reformed Church.
c. The duties of the minister are spiritual in character and directly related to the ministerial calling, and such duties do not conflict with the minister's commitment to the faith and practice of the Christian Reformed Church as required by one's signature to the Covenant for Officebearers.
d. If the congregation to be served is in close proximity to a Christian Reformed 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. Extension 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-Christian Reformed congregation which is being served shall have the right to suspend the minister from serving that church, but suspension from office and deposition may be applied only by the Christian Reformed Church.

g. Continuation under the Christian Reformed Church Pension Plan shall require that the minister, or the non-Christian Reformed church which is being served, shall contribute to the ministers' pension fund the amount which is determined annually by the Ministers' Pension Funds committees for ministers serving in extraordinary positions outside of our denomination.

(*Acts of Synod 1976*, pp. 33-34)
(*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 872)

Article 14

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

b. A minister of the Word who resigns from the ministry in the Christian Reformed Church to enter a ministry outside the denomination shall be released from office by the classis with an appropriate declaration reflecting the resigned minister's status and with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 14-b

c. A minister of the Word, once lawfully called, may not forsake the office. A minister 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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 14-c

d. A minister of the Word who has entered upon a vocation which classis judges to be non-ministerial shall be released from office within one year of that judgment. The concurring advice of the synodical deputies shall be obtained at the time of the judgment.

e. A former minister of the Word who was released from office may be declared eligible for call upon approval of the classis by which such action was taken, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies. The classis, in the presence of the deputies, shall conduct an interview that examines the circumstances surrounding the release and the renewed desire to serve in ministry. Upon acceptance of a call, the person shall be re-ordained.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 14-e

Supplement, Article 14-b

Declaration regarding ministers who resign from the CRC

a. Synod directed the churches and classes dealing with ministers who depart from the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) in order to seek ordination in the ministry of the Word in another church to take note of the statement made by Synod 1978 that "Synod has instructed all our churches and classes that in all cases of resignation a proper resolution of dismissal must be adopted with the concurring advice of synodical deputies" and to realize that this statement allows for a broad degree of flexibility in responding to such situations (cf. *Acts of Synod 1978*, p. 73).

b. Synod directed the churches and classes to take into account the manner and spirit in which a minister has acted during the time leading up to and including departure from office when determining what action to take. (Some situations may require a deposition; others may require only a simple release from office.)

c. Synod encouraged the churches and classes

   1) To recognize carefully the conditions and circumstances of a particular case that may come to their attention (e.g., whether it be a formal or a de facto resignation) and, having done so,

   2) To make a declaration reflecting the resigned minister's status that is appropriate to the way and spirit in which the minister acted during the time leading up to and including the minister's resignation from office. Such a declaration could reflect one of the following:

      a) The resigned minister is honorably released.

      b) The resigned minister is released.

      c) The resigned minister is dismissed.

      d) The resigned minister is in the status of one deposed.

Note: In distinction from a minister who retires, any resigned minister no longer retains the honor and title of minister of the Word in, nor has an official connection with, the Christian Reformed Church in North America (cf. Church Order Article 18-b).

d. Synod encouraged churches and classes to prayerfully consider the following principles in their deliberations:

   1) Schismatic activities are to be considered a serious violation of the sacred trust associated with ordination and a dishonoring of God which results in pain and brokenness in the body of Christ.

2) All declarations by churches and classes should clearly evidence hope for the possibility of restoration and mutual reconciliation.

(*Acts of Synod 1993*, pp. 581-82)

Supplement, Article 14-c

The provisions of Supplement, Article 14-b also apply to Article 14-c, especially in those situations when ministers resign under discipline or to avoid discipline.

Supplement, Article 14-e

The provisions of Supplement, Article 84 related to reinstatement of ministers who have been deposed also apply to ministers who resign under discipline or to avoid discipline and later seek reordination by way of Article 14-e.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 866)

Article 15

Each church through its council shall provide for the proper support of its minister(s). By way of exception and with the approval of classis, a church and minister may agree that a minister obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment. Ordinarily the foregoing exception shall be limited to churches that cannot obtain assistance adequate to support their minister.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 15

Supplement, Article 15

"Proper Support" Defined

Proper support of a church's minister is to include an adequate salary, medical insurance, a housing provision, payment to the denomination's ministers' pension plan, a continuing education stipend, and other employment-related items.

(*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 611)

Guidelines for Churches Whose Ministers Receive Salary Support from Other Employment

1. The church is responsible for a total compensation package proportionate to the time spent in ministry to the church (forty-eight hours equals full time). The compensation package shall ordinarily be based on synodically stated minimum salary, fringe benefits, and housing costs.

2. Since the compensation package includes a percentage allowance for health insurance, the minister is expected to secure adequate health insurance for the minister and the minister's family.
3. The value of the parsonage provided by the congregation may be used for part or all of the compensation package.
4. The minister shall receive pension credits in the Ministers' Pension Fund proportionate to the percentage of time devoted to the duties of the church. Eligibility for full pension credit may be secured if full contribution to the Ministers' Pension Plan is made.
5. The nature and amount of time of the task(s) other than ministry shall be specified. The average amount of time expended upon the total of the ministerial and nonministerial tasks shall not exceed sixty hours per week.

(*Acts of Synod 1987*, p. 572)

Article 16

A minister who for valid reasons desires a temporary leave of absence from service to the congregation must have the approval of the council, which shall continue to have supervision over the minister. In all cases of a temporary leave of absence the minister shall return to service in that congregation.

Article 17

a. Ministers who are neither eligible for retirement nor worthy of discipline may for weighty reasons be released from active ministerial service in a congregation through action initiated by themselves, by a council, or jointly. Such release shall be given only with the approval of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, and in accordance with synodical regulations.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 17-a

b. The council 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. A minister of the Word who has been released from active ministerial service in a congregation shall be eligible for call for a period of two years, after which time the classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, shall declare the minister to be released from the ministerial office. For weighty reasons the classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, may extend the eligibility for call on a yearly basis.

d. In some situations, the classis may decide that it cannot declare the released minister eligible for call after the minister has completed the process of evaluation and assistance. The classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, shall then declare the minister to be released from ministerial office.

Supplement, Article 17-a

Provisions regulating release from ministerial service in a congregation

a. If a classis decides a released minister needs evaluation and assistance before accepting another call, it shall specify at the time of release what is required before the minister is declared eligible for call.

1) The classis shall appoint an oversight committee of no fewer than three persons to plan and monitor an evaluation of readiness for the ministry that focuses on professional competence and personal/ emotional status. An evaluator or evaluators mutually agreed upon by the classis and the oversight committee shall conduct the evaluation. (Pastor Church Resources is able to recommend appropriate evaluators.) Classis shall determine who is responsible for any costs of evaluation or stipulated personal counseling.

a) The committee, composed of both laity and clergy, may include one council member of the congregation involved in the separation.

b) The committee, in consultation with the interim committee of classis, shall develop specific expectations for the minister and shall monitor progress toward established goals. The issues addressed shall be determined by concerns raised by the council and the classis in collaboration with the minister.

c) The committee shall present a progress report at each regularly scheduled classis meeting.

d) After it has received the report of the evaluator(s), the committee shall make a recommendation to classis regarding the minister's eligibility for call.

2) The minister shall participate in the evaluation and assistance process as follows:

a) The minister shall consent to the release of a detailed report, with recommendations, from the evaluator(s) to the oversight committee.

b) In addition to the evaluation stipulated above, the minister shall engage in any personal counseling required by classis with a therapist mutually agreed upon by the minister and the oversight committee.

3) Based upon the recommendation of its oversight committee, the classis shall make the final decision concerning the minister's readiness to be declared eligible for call.

4) If the classis does not declare the minister eligible for call, it shall, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies, release the minister from office.

5) With the approval of classis, a minister who has been released from service in a congregation may transfer his/her membership and ministerial credentials to a neighboring council within the classis during the evaluation process. If classis declares the minister eligible for call, the council that holds the minister's credentials shall publicize the minister's availability.

6) With the approval of classis, a minister who has been released from service in a congregation may transfer his/her membership and ministerial credentials to a council in another classis after the classis in which the separation occurred declares the minister eligible for call. The council that holds the minister's credentials shall publicize the minister's availability.

b. If a classis decides a congregation that has been separated from its minister needs a time of evaluation and assistance before extending another call, it shall specify at the time of separation what is required before the congregation calls another minister.

1) The classis shall appoint an oversight committee composed of the council's classical counselor and at least two other persons to plan and monitor the evaluation process.

2) In conjunction with the church council, the committee shall secure interim pastoral leadership, preferably a specialized interim pastor, and set goals. (Pastor Church Resources is able to assist with securing pastoral leadership.)

3) The committee shall present a progress report at each regularly scheduled classis meeting.

4) Based upon the recommendation of its oversight committee, the classis shall make the final decision concerning the congregation's readiness to extend a call.

(*Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 623-24)

Note: Councils and classes should take note of the regulations regarding "release from ministerial service" adopted by Synod 1998 (see *Acts of Synod 1998,* pp. 392-96) and as amended by Synod 2010 (see *Acts of Synod 2010*, pp. 915-16).

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 the office, is eligible for retirement. Retirement shall take place with the approval of the council and classis and in accordance with synodical regulations.

b. A retired minister shall retain the title of minister of the Word and the authority, conferred by the church, to perform official acts of ministry. Supervision shall remain with the church last served unless transferred to another congregation. The supervising church shall be responsible for

providing honorably for the minister's support and that of qualifying dependents according to synodical regulations.

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

—Cf. Supplement, Article 18

Supplement, Article 18

Retirement

Ministers shall have the privilege of retiring at the age of sixty-six years, if they so desire.

(*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 813)

Supervision of an emeritus minister (except when the minister remains as a member in the congregation, or when the emeritation is expected to be of a temporary nature) may be transferred, at the minister's request, to the church where they become a member after emeritation.

This transfer is to be made in the following manner: the council of the church which the emeritus minister served last formally requests the council of the church which the emeritus minister wishes to join, to exercise supervision over the minister.

(*Acts of Synod 1968*, p. 69)

Early Retirement Option

Ministers of the Word shall be granted the privilege of retiring at the age of fifty-five years, with the approval of the classes involved, under the reduced pension scale adopted by Synod 2011.

(*Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 579)
(*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 813)

"Official Acts of Ministry"

1) Certain acts of ministry—among them the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the pronouncement of blessings for the people, the laying of hands on new leaders, and the reception and formal dismissal of members—are part of the ministry of Christ to his followers and are entrusted to the church and, within the church, to its ordained leaders, not to a specific office.
2) Therefore, no long-standing, organized congregation of Christians should be deprived of these liturgical acts simply because it cannot provide for the presence of an ordained minister or commissioned pastor.
3) These acts of ministry symbolize and strengthen the relationships among the Lord, leaders, and the people of God. Their use is a sacred trust given to leaders by the Lord for the purpose of strengthening the flock. Therefore the administration of these acts should continue to be regulated by the church.

(*Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 504)

Article 19

The churches shall maintain a theological seminary at which persons 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 individuals to seek to become ministers of the Word and, in coordination with classis, shall grant financial aid to those who are in need of it.

—Cf. Supplement, Articles 6, 7, and 8

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

Supplement, Article 22

A. *Rules for Licensure*

1. The Candidacy Committee may grant licensure to conduct religious services in our churches only to such as
   a. are approved as students for minister of the Word and enrolled in a seminary program.
   b. have successfully completed the final examinations of one full year of seminary including work in biblical, theological, and preaching courses.
2. The Candidacy Committee shall not grant licensure to such students until it has made sure of the following with respect to such applicants:
   a. That they are members in good standing in our churches.
   b. That they have spiritual qualifications necessary for the ministry, and that they consider themselves called of God to prepare themselves for the office of ministering the gospel of Jesus Christ.
   c. That they intend to enter the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church.
   d. That they have sufficient knowledge of the Bible, and especially of our Reformed principles, to act as a guide to others.
   e. That they speak acceptably and to the edification of the churches. It is left to the discretion of the Candidacy

Committee, however, whether it will obtain this information by consulting the seminary faculty or by examining the applicant.

3. The Candidacy Committee 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 to those who are taking post-graduate work and declare that it is their definite intention to enter the ministry of 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 a request in writing, and at the end of the second year if applicants appear in person and are willing to submit to another examination (the latter part of this *Rule 3, c* does not apply to those who are taking post-graduate work outside of the United States or Canada).
4. The Candidacy Committee 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)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2004*, pp. 619-20)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 909)

B. *Licensure of International 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 make a recommendation regarding their 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 the ability to exhort to the satisfaction of our professor in homiletics.
4. The request for licensure must be sent to the Candidacy Committee.
5. The Candidacy Committee or its designees must interview the applicant.
6. The exhorting of the student must be under the auspices of Calvin Theological Seminary; the student may not make individual arrangements.
7. Licensure will be in force while the student is enrolled as a student at Calvin Theological Seminary. Extension of licensure must be made by special application.

(*Acts of Synod 1961*, p. 36)

C. The Commissioned Pastors

Article 23

a. Commissioned pastors shall be acknowledged as such in their calling churches. Normally, their work on the church council shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as commissioned pastors.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 23-a

b. Ordinarily, the office of commissioned pastors who serve in emerging congregations will terminate when a group of believers becomes an organized church. However, upon organization and with the approval of the newly formed council and the classis, commissioned pastors may continue to serve the newly organized church until an ordained minister of the Word is installed or until they have served the newly organized church for a reasonable period of transition. Commissioned pastors who continue to serve a newly organized congregation beyond this reasonable period of transition must seek the permission of classis with the concurrence of the synodical deputies.

c. Commissioned pastors may also serve in organized congregations along with a minister of the Word and may serve as chaplains in institutional settings in the community. Commissioned pastors who have served an organized congregation along with a minister of the Word may, in exceptional circumstances, with the approval of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, continue serving that congregation as a solo pastor after the minister of the Word has left.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 23-c

d. Commissioned pastors may be called to serve as solo pastors in organized congregations if the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, ascertains that such congregations are from a ministry context where the standards for pastoral preparation required by Articles 6, 7, or 8 are not presently practical.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 23-d

e. Commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their consistories and classes.

Note: The following reformatted text (from Articles 23 and 24) below (in *italics*) will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

a. The task of the commissioned pastor is to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries in order that believers may be called to comprehensive discipleship and unbelievers may be called to faith.

b. Commissioned pastors shall function under the direct supervision of the council, giving regular reports to it and being present at its meetings, particularly when their work is under consideration.

c. Commissioned pastors shall be acknowledged as such in their calling churches. Normally, their work on the church council shall be limited to the ministries in which they serve as commissioned pastors.

Supplement, Article 23-a

Note: Synod 2018 acknowledged draft changes to Supplement, Article 23 and draft supplementary material to be added to Article 24 (see *Agenda for Synod 2018,* pp. 214-21; *Acts of Synod 2018,* p. 465). Congregations and classes are invited to share comments/suggestions with the Candidacy Committee by September 15, 2018. The committee will present a final draft to Synod 2019 for approval.

General Regulations

The office of commissioned pastor is applicable to a variety of ministries, provided that these ministries fit the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001 and that the other Church Order and synodical regulations for the office of commissioned pastor are observed. These include ministries such as education, evangelism, pastoral care, music, and ministries to children, youth, adults, and others within or outside of the congregation. Before examining a person for the office of commissioned pastor or granting permission to install a previously ordained commissioned pastor in a new position, the classis, with the concurring advice of synodical deputies, will determine whether or not the position to which the person is being called fits the guidelines adopted by Synod 2001. In addition, the candidates for the office of commissioned pastor must have proven ability to function in the ministry to which they are being called.

Before a person who will serve as the solo pastor of an emerging or an organized church is examined for a position as a commissioned pastor, that person, in cooperation with classis, shall develop and complete a contextualized learning plan, adopted by classis and approved by the Candidacy Committee. Ordinarily the learning plan would include an introduction to the CRC Church Order, CRC history, CRC ministry, CRC creeds and confessions, Reformed hermeneutics, and an introduction to the discipline and art of preaching.

At some point prior to any examination for ordination of a commissioned pastor being considered for a solo pastor position in an emerging or organized church, the classis must ascertain that a learning plan has been approved by the classis and agreed to by the Candidacy Committee, and synodical deputies must affirm through a written report that such approvals have taken place.

The candidate shall also sustain a classical examination. The concurrence of synodical deputies is not required for the examination of a candidate for the office of commissioned pastor. The classical examination shall include the following elements:

1) Presentation of the following documents
   a) A council recommendation from the church in which the appointee holds membership
   b) Evidence (diplomas, transcripts, etc.) of formal general education and of specialized training in the ministry area to which the candidate is being called

c) A copy of the letter of appointment from the church that is requesting ordination of the candidate as commissioned pastor

d) A copy of the candidate's letter of acceptance

2) Where applicable, presentation of a sermon

a) In an official worship service, preferably on the Sunday preceding the meeting of classis and in the church to which the candidate for ordination has been called, the commissioned pastor shall preach a sermon on a text assigned by classis. Two members of classis shall be present to serve as sermon critics.

b) A copy of the sermon shall be provided to the classical delegates. In the presence of the commissioned pastor, the sermon critics shall evaluate the sermon and the commissioned pastor's manner of conducting the entire worship service.

3) Examination in the following areas

a) Knowledge of Scripture

b) Knowledge of Reformed doctrine

c) Knowledge of the standards of the church and the Church Order

d) Practical matters regarding Christian testimony, walk of life, relationships with others, love for the church, approach to ministry, and promotion of Christ's kingdom

The classis shall ensure that the candidate meets the standards of character, knowledge, and skill adopted by Synod 2004 (*Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 619) and inserted below.

The classis shall also ensure that commissioned pastors, especially those working at some distance from their calling congregations, will have proper supervision and support for their ministry.

When the commissioned pastors accept another call, their ordination shall require the approval of the classis to which their calling church belongs, to which the commissioned pastors shall have presented good ecclesiastical testimonies of doctrine and life given to them by their former council and classis.

A calling church that terminates the service of a person in an approved commissioned pastor position must seek the concurrence of the classis in which approval was given.

Elements of a Good Job Description

1. A description of the functions and responsibilities that are ministerial in nature (see the first paragraph of Church Order Supplement, Article 23-a).
2. A description of the supervision and lines of accountability for the position.

3. Specific notation of whether preaching and/or administering the sacraments are to be included in the position.

(*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 741)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 557; *2017*, p. 689)

Standards to be Met by Those Seeking to be Ordained as a Commissioned Pastor

An examination for the office of commissioned pastor will require that all commissioned pastors meet the church's standards for character and knowledge, whereas the standards for skill competence will relate specifically to the particular commissioned pastor's area of calling and expertise.

Qualifications for a Commissioned Pastor

Character

The commissioned pastor is mature in Christ. "Christ-likeness" covers all of what it means to be godly. The following guidelines, which are rooted in Scripture (references are meant to be illustrative, not exhaustive), suggest many aspects of godly character:

1. **Devoted to Jesus** - The commissioned pastor is "in Christ" (John 15:5), filled with his Spirit (Acts 1:8), and exercises personal spiritual disciplines.
2. **Committed to the church and its mission** (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:1-4, Eph. 4:11-13, 1 Tim. 5:22) - The commissioned pastor is a person in Christian community. She/he has been tested and proven. She/he has been recognized as prepared for ministry by the community of believers and evidences accountability to it.
3. **Called and gifted** (Matt. 28:16ff, Acts 1:8) - The commissioned pastor has a calling from God that is confirmed by the church. That calling provides her/him with a mission, with vision, and with intrinsic motivation. She/he ministers out of giftedness (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12, etc.).
4. **Filled with love** (Matt. 22:37-40) - The commissioned pastor is characterized by love—love of God, love of self, and love of others, including lost and diverse people.
5. **Possesses the fruit of the spirit** (Gal. 5:22-23) - The commissioned pastor gives evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.
6. **Possesses the qualities of an officebearer** (1 Tim. 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9) - The commissioned pastor demonstrates such qualities as being: reputable, loyal, self-disciplined, respected, hospitable, mature, honest, sincere, teachable and able to teach, emotionally stable, blameless, lover of God and not money, resilient, responsible, not quick-tempered, not overbearing, not quarrelsome, not abusive (of others or substances), managing her/his own household well (including spousal support of ministry), risk-taking, flexible, adaptable, etc.

7. **Has a servant's heart** (Matt. 20:26) - The commissioned pastor is a servant-leader.
8. **Possesses wisdom** (Prov. 1:1-7) - The commissioned pastor lives according to God's design, recognizes Christ as "wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:30, Col. 2:3), and seeks wisdom from above (James 1:5, 3:13).
9. **Manages life well** - The commissioned pastor practices good stewardship of time, talents, finances, and physical creation (Gen. 1:27-28, Ps. 8:6-8).
10. **Eager to learn** - The commissioned pastor is a lifelong learner, ever studying God's word and world (Ps. 19) and demonstrates that she/he has been and is currently being mentored.

Biblical Knowledge

The commissioned pastor has a working knowledge of the Bible in her/his native language, and:

1. is able to identify Scripture's main themes (covenant, kingdom of God, missio Dei, etc.) and to locate their place in the redemptive history that is centered in Christ;
2. has command of the divisions of Scripture (Law, prophets, gospels, epistles, etc.), the historical and literary contexts of each biblical book, and basic hermeneutical principles required to interpret them;
3. is able to demonstrate knowledge of key Scripture passages, and to apply them appropriately to life and ministry.

Based on the above, the commissioned pastor is able to prepare and preach/teach meaningful and motivational messages/lessons that are true to Scripture. The commissioned pastor is able to communicate clearly the gospel to unbelievers and believers.

Theological Knowledge

1. The commissioned pastor has knowledge of doctrinal standards and systematic theology at the level of Berkhof's *Manual of Christian Doctrine.* This would include knowledge of Reformed systematic theology, the Ecumenical Creeds, and the three confessional standards of the Christian Reformed Church. Furthermore, the commissioned pastor is able to differentiate and defend the Reformed faith biblically from other systems of thought, both Christian and non-Christian. She/he is able to reflect from a biblical perspective on the cultures, circumstances, and events of everyday life and ministry.
2. The commissioned pastor has a basic knowledge of church history (including Christian Reformed Church history and culture) and is able to apply its lessons to present reality and ministry.

Skill - Practice of Ministry

Commissioned pastors give evidence of ministry skills. The skills necessary for ministry are many, and not all commissioned pastors possess them in the same measure. Someone in a ministry position will be expected to demonstrate skills in relation to the particularity of her/his position. Commissioned pastors, whether in specialized ministry within an organized congregation or in new church development, use skills to lead the church of Jesus Christ to fulfill the New Testament purposes of outreach, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. Some necessary ministry skills are:

1. **Leadership & Administration** - The commissioned pastor is able to help people and the church move from where they are to where God wants them to be. To do this, commissioned pastors possess such skills as: casting vision; creating ownership; creating functional organizational systems; resolving conflict; developing gift-based ministries; planning ministry; developing and mentoring leaders; and managing time, money, and people (according to principles of CRC polity).
2. **Outreach** - The commissioned pastor is able personally to share (witness); to defend (apologetics) the faith; and to lead the church in reaching out to the lost, in receiving them, and in developing new churches.
3. **Worship** - The commissioned pastor is able to prepare and deliver messages/teach lessons (homiletics), administer the sacraments, and lead in worship and prayer.
4. **Pastoral Care** - The commissioned pastor possesses relational skills that enable her/him to provide personally and through the church (corporately) pastoral care, visitation, small groups, youth ministry, spiritual counsel, and conduct of weddings and funerals.
5. **Fellowship** - The commissioned pastor is able to foster a nurturing Christian community.
6. **Discipleship** - The commissioned pastor is able to raise up, teach, and nurture disciple-making disciples.
7. **Service** - The commissioned pastor is able to respond to personal and community needs by mobilizing the church for ministry.
8. **Specialized** - The commissioned pastor has any necessary skills specific to her/his particular calling within the church.

(See *Acts of Synod 2004*, p. 619 and *Agenda for Synod 2004*, pp. 373-75)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2009*, pp. 583-84)

Release of a Commissioned Pastor

A commissioned pastor who is released from a calling church may, upon the request of the commissioned pastor or the calling church, and with the approval of the classis, be assisted by the classis with a system of evaluation and assistance analogous to that described in Church Order Article 17 for ministers of the Word.

(*Acts of Synod 2017*, p. 685)

Supplement, Article 23-c

The mandate, characteristics, and guiding principles that define chaplains ordained as ministers of the Word are applicable to chaplains ordained under Article 23.

(*Acts of Synod 2003*, p. 613)

Supplement, Article 23-d

Guideline for calling a commissioned pastor to an organized congregation

The ministry context is ordinarily one in which cultural differences (e.g., ethnic, social, economic, educational, language) between the congregation and its ministry context on the one hand, and the dominant culture of the denomination as expressed in the seminary, other leadership development entities, and broader denominational life on the other hand (a) present significant obstacles to raising up indigenous leadership in ways that are sustainable by the respective congregations and communities, and (b) have resulted in limited- or non-availability of competent indigenous leaders trained for ministry via one of the prescribed routes for ministry of the Word.

(*Acts of Synod 2008*, p. 520)

Article 24

a. The task of the commissioned pastor is to bear witness to Christ through the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, church education, pastoral care, evangelism, and other ministries in order that believers may be called to comprehensive discipleship and unbelievers may be called to faith.

b. Commissioned pastors shall function under the direct supervision of the council, giving regular reports to it and being present at its meetings, particularly when their work is under consideration.

Note: The following reformatted text (from Articles 23 and 24) below (in *italics*) will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

a. Commissioned pastors may serve in a solo or senior leadership position in an organized church only with the permission of classis and the concurrence of synodical deputies, following the synodically approved rules for such an arrangement, which are explained in the Commissioned Pastor Handbook.

b. Commissioned pastors who desire to serve beyond their specific field of labor must secure the approval of their councils and classes.

c. A commissioned pastor position may be eliminated and a commissioned pastor may be released only with the concurrence of the classis that approved the position, with attention to the rules and processes approved by synod.

d. A commissioned pastor who has reached retirement age may, upon the judgment of classis, be given the title of commissioned pastor emeritus.

e. Commissioned pastors may be called to a position in which the call is for a specified term contingent upon accountable progress toward completion of the

requirements for ordination as a minister of the Word. Approval of the classis, with the concurrence of synodical deputies, is required as to the terms of such a call and the accountability of progress in the proposed learning plan.

D. The Elders and Deacons

Article 25

a. The elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designated by the council. The length of term should be appropriate for continuity and succession of ministry leadership. Retiring officebearers shall be succeeded by others unless the circumstances and the profit of the church make immediate eligibility for reelection advisable. Elders and deacons who are thus reelected shall be reinstalled.

b. The elders, with the minister(s), shall oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow officebearers, shall provide counsel and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, shall participate in and promote evangelism, and shall defend the faith. As shepherds of the church, they shall encourage and support the members in their Christian life. The elders also shall nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation in the Lord's Supper through encouragement, instruction, and accountability.

c. The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people, especially to those who belong to the community of believers. Deacons shall lead the members in ways that inspire faithful stewardship of their time, talents, and resources and so give life in this world the shape of God's kingdom. Thus deacons shall create and encourage participation in structures and ministries of mercy, justice, and reconciliation, both locally and globally. All of this shall be done with words of biblical encouragement and testimony, which assure the unity of word and deed.

II. THE ASSEMBLIES OF THE CHURCH

A. General Provisions

Article 26

The assemblies of the church are the council, 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 councils being original, that of major assemblies being delegated.

b. The classis has the same authority over the council 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.

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. Synod may establish rights for other appeals and adopt rules for processing them.

c. If invoked, the Judicial Code shall apply to the processing of written charges, unless the assembly to which the charges are submitted has dealt with and ruled definitively on substantially similar appeals in a manner pursuant to the provisions of Article 30-a.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 30-a through -c

Supplement, Article 30-a

PROCEDURAL RULES APPLICABLE TO APPEALS UNDER ARTICLE 30-a OF THE CHURCH ORDER WHEN THE JUDICIAL CODE IS NOT INVOKED

A. *Appeal by a Member (Appellant) from a Decision or Action of a Council (Respondent)*

1. *Time Limit.* An appeal must be made within six (6) months of the decision or action appealed from. If, however, the action or decision appealed from creates a continuous or repeating practice, the appeal is timely if filed within six (6) months after the practice is exercised. A classis may accept a late appeal if classis is satisfied that the appellant has reasonable cause for being late.
2. *Oral Presentation.* When classis considers the appeal, both appellant and respondent shall be allowed reasonable time to make an oral presentation with respect to the appeal.
3. *Action by Classis.* The classis shall consider and decide every appeal properly submitted to it. Classis shall decide on the appeal within one (1) year from the date the appeal is received by the stated clerk of classis. If classis has not decided an appeal within the one (1)-year period allowed, either the appellant or the respondent has the right to appeal the matter to synod without waiting for decision of classis.

4. *Appeal to Synod.* Both the appellant and the respondent have the right to appeal the decision of classis to synod.

B. *Appeals to Synod by Members or Assemblies (Appellant) from Decision of Classis (Respondent)*

1. *Time Limit*. An appeal must be filed within ninety (90) days after the decision or action appealed.
2. Normally for an appeal to be considered by a synod in any year the appeal must be in the hands of the executive director by March 15 of that year. If an appeal is filed after March 15, it shall not be heard by the synod of the same year; however, the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church, upon the recommendation of the executive director, may decide to submit the appeal to the synod of the same year.
3. Normally appeals will not be printed in the agenda for synod. However, if the Council of Delegates of the Christian Reformed Church, upon recommendation of the executive director, decides that an appeal raises an issue the resolution of which by synod will likely have significant application outside of and beyond the classis from which the appeal came, the appeal and any response to it or, at the discretion of the executive director, an abbreviated version of the appeal and response will be printed in the agenda. If an appeal is filed before March 15 but the deadline for response falls after March 15, the executive director, after conferring with the respondent, may decide to print the appeal and distribute any responses to delegates at the beginning of synod or to hold the appeal over to the next synod.
4. The appellant and the respondent shall have the right to appear before the advisory committee of synod to explain their positions. Requests to be heard shall be directed to the executive director, who shall transmit them to the chairperson of the advisory committee.
5. The appellant and the respondent shall have the right to be present during the presentation of the case at synod, and, upon recommendation of the advisory committee and with the approval of synod, they shall have the privilege of explaining and defending their positions on the floor of synod.
6. The advisory committee shall present a clear and adequate statement of the content of each appeal and response to the entire synod.
7. Copies of the appeals and responses not appearing in the agenda and, if possible, the principal related documents shall be sent to the members of the appointed advisory committee as soon as possible.

C. *General Rules*

1. *Filing an appeal.* An appeal must be in writing and filed with the stated clerk or executive director of the assembly appealed to. A copy shall be promptly given to the clerk of the assembly whose action is being appealed and to any other party to the appeal.
2. *Form of Appeal*. No specific form is prescribed. However, an appeal should contain at least the following elements:
   a. The name of the appellant.
   b. The name of the body against which the appeal is being made.
   c. The decision which is being appealed.
   d. The reasons why the appealed decision is believed to be wrong.
   e. Background information which will enable the assembly to make a proper decision.
   f. A statement defining clearly what action the appellant desires the assembly to take.
3. *Respondent's Submission.* The respondent shall be entitled to submit a response to the appeal. Such submission shall be made to the clerk of the assembly appealed to within sixty (60) days from the date the respondent has received a copy of the appeal. A copy of such submission shall be promptly given to the appellant.
4. In any appearance before an assembly or a committee of an assembly, the appellant and the respondent shall have the right to be represented or counseled by a member of the church.

Supplement, Article 30-b

This supplement deals with two separate matters: synodical review of application for candidacy by persons not recommended by the Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) Board of Trustees and/or the Candidacy Committee and appeals from decisions, acts, or course of conduct of agencies, boards, or committees of the Christian Reformed Church. The separate sets of procedural rules applicable to these two matters are set forth below.

Part A. Synodical review of application for candidacy by persons not recommended by the CTS Board of Trustees and/or the Candidacy Committee.

In the event that an applicant should feel aggrieved by or dissatisfied with a decision of the CTS Board of Trustees and/or Candidacy Committee regarding the processing of the applicant's application for candidacy status, the following procedure will give the applicant recourse to synod. This procedure is not an appropriate avenue by which to ask synod for amendment of the Church Order or change in relevant synodical decisions. Rather, it provides the right for an applicant to have the application for candidacy considered by synod in

the light of the then-existing requirements for candidacy, whether those requirements are set out in the Church Order or in other decisions of synod. This procedure is a special kind of appeal: the Judicial Code shall not be invoked, and the rules relating to other appeals shall not apply.

1. If the CTS Board of Trustees and/or Candidacy Committee or its designee declines to process an application for candidacy at any stage or if candidacy is not going to be recommended, the Candidacy Committee shall promptly inform the applicant in writing of such act or decision and the reasons therefore.
2. Notwithstanding such notice, the applicant has the option to have the application processed, including submission to synod. To exercise this option, the applicant must give written notice of such exercise to the Candidacy Committee and the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church within fourteen (14) days after the receipt of the notice from the Candidacy Committee.
3. If the applicant gives the notice described in the foregoing paragraph, the application shall be processed, and the Candidacy Committee shall submit such application to synod with such recommendations and supporting reasons as the Candidacy Committee shall consider appropriate.
4. At least ten (10) days before synod is scheduled to convene, the applicant shall submit to the executive director, with a copy to the Candidacy Committee, a written statement of facts, argument, and documents in support of the application.
5. Synod shall review the application and documents in support thereof, the decision of the board or the Candidacy Committee, and the reasons for such decision. The applicant and the Candidacy Committee shall have the right to make a presentation to the assigned advisory committee, and, if that committee recommends and synod so decides, the applicant and the Candidacy Committee shall be allowed time to address synod on the matter.
6. Both the applicant and the Candidacy Committee have the right to be represented or counseled by a member of the church at any stage of the review process.

Part B. Appeals from decisions, acts, or course of conduct of agencies, boards, or committees of the Christian Reformed Church.

The right to appeal from decisions, acts, or course of conduct of agencies, boards, or committees of the Christian Reformed Church is established. The Judicial Code may be invoked in connection with such appeal, and if it is, the appeal process will be governed by the Judicial Code. If the Judicial Code is not invoked, the provisions and procedures set forth in the following paragraphs shall apply:

1. *Board, agency, or committee* shall mean and include any agent or employee of such board, agency, or committee while such agent

or employee is acting within the scope and authority of his or her employment with such agency, board, or committee.

2. Appeals under this part of Supplement 30-b may be filed only by the following:
   a. A member of the Christian Reformed Church.
   b. An assembly (council or classis).
   c. An employee of an agency, board, or committee whose decision, act, or course of conduct is to be challenged by the appeal.
3. The individual or assembly filing the appeal shall be called the *appellant*. The agency, board, or committee whose action is appealed shall be called the *respondent*.
4. No appeal under this part of Supplement 30-b may be filed until the appellant shall first have exhausted all reasonable and direct efforts according to procedures prescribed by such agency, board, or committee to resolve the appellant's complaint or grievance.
5. The only grounds for an appeal under this part are that the decision, act, or course of conduct of a respondent is contrary to the Church Order, the mandate of the respondent, or a previous decision of the assembly to which the respondent is responsible.
6. In an appeal under this part, an appellant who is other than an assembly or an employee must allege—and the onus remains on him or her to show—that the decision, act, or course of conduct appealed from substantially affects him or her directly, either materially or personally, as an individual apart from other members of the church.
7. In an appeal under this part by an employee, the appellant must allege—and the onus remains on her or him to show—that the decision, act, or course of conduct appealed from substantially affects her or him directly, either materially or personally, in her or his capacity as an employee.
8. An appeal from a decision, act, or course of conduct of an agency, board, or committee shall be filed with the assembly to which the agency, board, or committee is responsible.
9. For an appeal to be timely, it must be filed within ninety (90) days after completion of efforts to resolve the matter under provisions in paragraph "4" above.

   Because the completion of internal efforts to resolve the matter may not always indicate a precise date for the commencement of the ninety (90)-day appeal period, the following standards apply for computing the beginning of the appeal period:

   a. If the agency, board, or committee gives the appellant a written communication stating that the internal procedures for resolving the grievance or complaint have now been

completed, the ninety (90)-day period begins with the date the appellant receives such letter.

b. In the absence of a written communication described in paragraph "a" above, the appellant may give written notice to the agency, board, or committee involved that he or she believes that the internal procedures for resolving the grievance or complaint have been exhausted, and, if there is no written response to such notice within thirty (30) days from the date of the receipt of such notice, the ninety (90)-day appeal period begins with the expiration of a thirty (30)-day period beginning with the receipt of such notice. For the purpose of this paragraph, the notice shall be deemed to have been received on the date it was personally delivered to the office of the agency, board, or committee or five days after the mailing by regular mail.

c. If the notice referred to in paragraph "b" above is given and the agency, board, or committee responds to the appellant within thirty (30) days that there is a further internal procedure, the appellant must pursue the additional procedure specified, and rules "a" and "b" will again apply to determine the commencement of the appeal period when the further step has been completed.

10. If the appeal is to a classis, when classis considers the appeal, both appellant and respondent shall be allowed reasonable time to make an oral presentation with respect to the appeal. The classis shall consider and decide every appeal submitted to it. Classis shall decide on the appeal within one (1) year from the date the appeal is received by the stated clerk of classis. If classis has not decided an appeal within such one (1)-year period, either appellant or respondent has the right to appeal to synod without waiting for the decision of classis.

    Both the appellant and the respondent have the right to appeal the decision of classis to synod.

11. If the appeal is initially to synod, the rules and procedures in Church Order Supplements 30-a, sections B and C apply.

12. Both the appellant and the respondent have the right to be represented or counseled by a member of the church at any stage of the appeal process.

Supplement, Article 30-c

JUDICIAL CODE OF RIGHTS AND PROCEDURES

Preamble to the Judicial Code

Synod 1977 adopted the first edition of the Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures. It did so to "encourage greater uniformity of procedure

throughout our denomination when charges must be adjudicated." The belief is that this Code "will help to insure just treatment of those who are involved in the judgment and decisions of the church" and that providing "impartial judgments among God's people" is required by Scripture (Deut. 1:16-17; Deut. 16:18-20; Lev. 19:15; 1 Tim. 5:19-21). "Procedural guidelines" are needed to deal with substantive issues in an appropriate and "ecclesiastical manner" (Church Order, Article 28), and, according to synod, the Judicial Code provides this "procedural pattern within which the law of love may be fulfilled (cf. James 2:1, 8-9)."

However, the Judicial Code should not be considered as providing a means of broad applicability for resolving disputes. Rather, the Judicial Code is intended to be a dispute-resolution mechanism of last resort because judicial hearings and subsequent decisions of assemblies will likely never fully satisfy the parties involved. Thus, complete reconciliation may not be achieved. Rather, the focus of Judicial Code hearings and of the resultant decisions made by the assemblies is not primarily on reconciliation but on some kind of final resolution. While the Judicial Code does provide rights for all parties and a fair process toward resolution, it does not purport to restore the mutual trust that may have been lost as any given dispute may have raged and festered.

Before invoking the rights afforded under the Judicial Code, brothers and sisters in Christ should make every effort to resolve issues between them amicably, according to the teachings of Scripture. If they require external assistance to reach agreement, they should, where appropriate, seek trained facilitators or mediators to help them reach agreement. A process of mediation led by neutral parties may facilitate a more satisfactory resolution.

One of the ways in which issues can be resolved more amicably is to use restorative justice practices. Synod 2005 encouraged "the active participation of churches and church members in restorative justice efforts in order to restore and reconcile victims and offenders where possible, and to effect, as far as possible, the establishment of justice for all members of our societies." It also urged "congregations, schools, denominational offices, other Christian institutions, and homes to employ restorative justice practices" (*Acts of Synod 2005*, pp. 761-62). These practices bring with them greater potential for true reconciliation.

On the other hand, mediation or restorative justice practices are not necessarily appropriate for charges involving physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. Such charges should be dealt with in the first instance by way of the Advisory Panel Process approved by synod and associated with the denomination's Safe Church Ministry (see *Acts of Synod 2010*, p. 866; *Agenda for Synod 2010,* pp. 497-502).

Thus, even if written charges have been filed and a formal hearing has been requested, the assembly must still make a determination as to whether or not sufficient means for resolution, formal or informal, have or have not been exhausted. If such means have not been exhausted, the assembly should seriously consider postponing the judicial hearing while further efforts are undertaken. Only after

the assembly determines that sufficient means have been exhausted or that such means do not resolve the matter, should the assembly proceed to conduct a judicial hearing as set forth below.

Section 1: Scope of the Judicial Code

a. Disputes arising from allegations of offenses against the Word of God, doctrinal standards, or Church Order are subject to resolution under the Judicial Code. In particular, the Judicial Code governs the procedure for filing written charges and conducting judicial hearings before a council, classis, or synod, and appeals from judicial hearing.
b. Matters of admonition and discipline do not prompt a judicial hearing unless there are written charges that either party or the assembly determines require a judicial hearing. The Judicial Code recognizes the fundamental and primary role of pastoral means in all matters of admonition and discipline; it assumes that these matters are best handled by counseling and entreaty; and if sanctions are required, it leaves the determination of them to the church under the Church Order.
c. The Judicial Code deals with the following matters:
    i) Disputes involving members and/or assemblies of the church and, in some limited instances, nonmembers (see Section 3-a).
    ii) Disputes involving agencies, boards, or committees on one side and members or assemblies of the church on the other side, excluding challenges to termination of employment (see Sections 3-a, 5-d, 5-e).
d. With respect to such matters, the provisions of the Judicial Code apply only
    i) when written charges are filed; written charges may be filed by an employee, an assembly, or an individual who is directly affected either materially or personally; and
    ii) when either party to the dispute requests a judicial hearing or when the assembly first hearing the charges determines to constitute a formal hearing.

Section 2: Judicial Rights

a. Both the complainant and the respondent shall have the right to be represented or counseled by a member of the CRC in any judicial hearing. The requirement of church membership may be waived at the discretion of the assembly that is hearing the case.
b. Except when the assembly withdraws to decide the issues raised in the judicial hearing, the complainant and the respondent shall have the right to be present at the judicial hearing and at the judicial hearing considering an appeal from a judicial hearing.
c. Both the complainant and the respondent shall have the right to have witnesses examined in their presence.

d. Both the complainant and the respondent may appeal by right the decision of the assembly to the assembly next in order.
e. The provisions of the Judicial Code shall apply to all appeals from decisions resulting from the judicial hearing on a complaint.
f. No member or group of the CRC, nor any person connected with the matter, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any complaints before the final disposition of same, including appeals, if any.
g. Assuring due process shall be the guiding principle in the interpretation and application of the Judicial Code.
h. All judicial hearings shall be conducted in a considerate and Christian manner.

Section 3: Procedures for Filing Written Charges

a. Written charges may be filed by
   i) a member of the CRC against another member or against an assembly;
   ii) an assembly against another assembly or against a member;
   iii) a person who is not a member of the CRC against a member or assembly of the CRC, provided such person has been directly affected as an individual by the charged offense;
   iv) a member of the CRC against an agency, board, or committee;
   v) an assembly against an agency, board, or committee;
   vi) an employee of an agency, board, or committee against an agency, board, or committee, excluding challenges to termination of employment.
b. Prerequisites:
   i) If the allegation is abuse on the part of a church leader as defined by the CRC's Safe Church Ministry's Advisory Panel Process, the complainant shall first have exhausted that process in accordance with the procedures and standards of confidentiality outlined therein and in lieu of the procedures under Sections 2-5 of this Code, to the point of obtaining a decision by the council of the church leader. Both parties have the right of appeal to classis as provided in Sections 6-7.
   ii) No written charges against an agency, board, or committee may be filed until the complainant shall first have exhausted all reasonable and direct efforts according to procedures prescribed by such agency, board, or committee to resolve the appellant's complaint or grievance internally.
c. Time limits:
   i) There is no time limit for filing a written charge of sexual abuse. Allegations of sexual abuse against a church leader shall first be made in accord with the Advisory Panel Process associated with the CRC's Safe Church Ministry.
   ii) An allegation of non-sexual abuse of a minor may be filed at any time before the complainant reaches age twenty-five (25).

However, allegations of non-sexual abuse of a minor shall first be made in accord with the Advisory Panel Process associated with the CRC's Safe Church Ministry.

iii) All other written charges must be filed within three (3) years of the date on which the offense is alleged to have occurred.

d. A person or an assembly filing a written charge shall be called the complainant, and the person or assembly against whom the written charge is filed shall be called the respondent.
e. A written charge must be filed with an assembly, must set forth the alleged offense, must specify the facts relied upon to support the written charge, including, as far as possible, the time and place of the offense, and must state whether a judicial hearing is requested.
f. A written charge shall not allege more than one offense. Several written charges against the same respondent may be presented and decided jointly, but a decision on each written charge must be made separately.
g. The complainant shall mail or otherwise deliver a copy of the written charge to the respondent at the same time as it is filed with the assembly.
h. Within sixty (60) days after the written charge is filed, the respondent shall file an answer with the assembly and shall mail or otherwise deliver a copy to the complainant. If the complainant did not request a judicial hearing, the respondent shall indicate in the answer whether a judicial hearing is requested.
i. Jurisdiction of assemblies
   i) A written charge against a member of the CRC shall be filed by the complainant with the council of the local church of which the respondent is a member.
   ii) A written charge against an assembly shall be filed by the complainant with the assembly next in order (the order being council, classis, and synod).
   iii) A written charge against an agency, board, or committee, including its agent or employees, shall be filed by the complainant with the assembly to which the agency, board, or committee is responsible.
   iv) If a council or an agency, board, or committee of classis is the respondent, the judicial hearing shall be before the classis and in accordance with the hearing procedures set forth in Sections 2-5.
   v) If a classis or an agency, board, or committee of synod is the respondent, the judicial hearing shall be before the Judicial Code Committee in accordance with the procedures set forth in Sections 2-5.

Section 4: Pre-hearing Procedures

a. Except for good cause, the judicial hearing shall commence within six (6) months of the filing of written charges.

b. After consulting with the complainant and the respondent, the assembly shall set the time and place for the judicial hearing on the written charge. At least forty-five (45) days before the judicial hearing, the date must be fixed and the parties notified.
c. No later than thirty (30) days before the judicial hearing, the parties shall cause to be delivered to the other party and the assembly a list of witnesses to be called to testify and a copy of the exhibits to be offered at the judicial hearing. At the judicial hearing, each party shall be limited to the witnesses and the exhibits disclosed, unless the party can establish that the witness or exhibit was not discovered until after the deadline.
d. The assembly may, in its discretion, require further advance disclosures by the parties concerning the witnesses, documents, evidence, and arguments that they intend to present at the hearing.
e. When a written charge is filed with a council or classis, that council or classis shall serve as the judicial body, which shall include all members of the assembly except those who have a conflict of interest. Any members having a conflict of interest shall recuse themselves.
f. Either the complainant or the respondent may challenge the impartiality of a member on grounds of self-interest or that member's relationship with or responsibility to a participant in the judicial hearing. If the assembly decides by majority vote that the challenge has merit, the member shall be recused from the judicial hearing.
g. Before the hearing, the assembly shall determine whether the written charges are substantial enough to warrant a hearing. This may be done by the assembly on the basis of the written charge, the answer, the proposed exhibits, and, if the assembly so desires, an informal conference with the parties and their representatives. The assembly may delegate the review of information and the informal conference to a committee, but after receiving a report from the committee, the assembly must make the determination. This determination shall be conducted in a confidential manner to protect the reputations of the people involved and to protect the impartiality of the judicial assembly if the charge moves forward. A decision by a council or a classis that a charge is not substantial may be appealed.
h. If requested by either the complainant or the respondent, or in the discretion of the assembly, the assembly may direct that the proceeding shall not be published by any participant. All participants shall be notified on the record of the no-publication directive.

Section 5: Judicial Hearing Procedures

a. A judicial hearing, if ordered, shall proceed as follows:
    i) Each party may make an opening statement summarizing what that party expects to prove.

ii) The complainant shall proceed first with proofs, including witnesses and exhibits, and may be permitted by the assembly in its discretion to present rebuttal proofs.
iii) The respondent shall then proceed with proofs, including witnesses and exhibits.
iv) The receipt of evidence shall not be controlled by formal rules of evidence. The administration of oaths shall not be required.
v) At the request of either party, the presiding officer may exclude any evidence if the presiding officer determines that admitting such evidence would be irrelevant, untrustworthy, or fundamentally unfair.
vi) Both parties are permitted to question witnesses that testify at a judicial hearing unless the parties agree in writing at least fifteen (15) days before the hearing to admit a written statement of a witness.
vii) After all evidence has been presented to the assembly, the complainant and the respondent shall summarize their cases either orally or in writing. The complainant may be afforded the opportunity for rebuttal.
viii) If either party objects to irregularity in the proceedings, the objection must be entered into the record. The presiding officer may sustain or disallow the objection. If the chair's ruling is challenged, the assembly must vote on the question of sustaining the chair.

b. The testimony shall be recorded verbatim.
c. The complainant has the burden to prove the written charge. Written charges must be proven with a high degree of probability.
d. If a complainant other than an employee or an assembly has filed written charges against an agency, board, or committee, he or she must allege—and the burden remains on him or her to show in any hearing—that the decision, act, or course of conduct being challenged substantially affects him or her directly, either materially or personally, and as an individual apart from other members of the church.
e. If a complainant is an employee who has filed written charges against an agency, board, or committee, he or she must allege—and the burden remains on him or her to show in any hearing—that the decision, act, or course of conduct being challenged substantially affects him or her directly, either materially or personally, in his or her capacity as an employee.
f. If a respondent fails to appear and the assembly determines that the respondent has been notified of the time and place of the judicial hearing and has had sufficient time to appear, the assembly may proceed in the respondent's absence.
g. During the hearing, the presiding officer shall not comment on the merits of the case. This restriction does not apply when the assembly enters its final deliberations.

h. The final decision on any case shall be by majority vote of the assembly of the members hearing the case. Any member that has not attended all the sessions or heard the case in its entirety may not vote unless that member reads or listens to the record before a vote is taken.
i. The record of all proceedings including the testimony, the exhibits, papers, evidence, and findings in the case shall be certified by the presiding officer and shall be the basis of any appeal. The parties may have reasonable access to the record.

Section 6: Appeals

a. Appeals shall be filed with the assembly next in order.
b. The grounds for an appeal include irregularities in the proceedings of the lower assembly; decisions on the admission or exclusion of evidence; bias or prejudice in the case; manifest injustice in the judgment; or incorrect interpretation or application of the Word of God, doctrinal standards, or Church Order; and shall be based on the record of the judicial hearing.
c. No decision resulting from a judicial hearing shall be amended or overturned except on a showing that the procedures were manifestly unfair; that the evidence obviously did not support the decision; or that an incorrect interpretation or application of the Word of God, doctrinal standards, or Church Order was made.
d. The reviewing assembly shall not reassess the credibility of the witnesses that testified at the hearing.
e. Appeals to synod from decisions of assemblies of the CRC acting in their judicial capacity and appeals from a board, agency, or committee of synod when the Judicial Code has been invoked shall be referred to the Judicial Code Committee.
f. Persons that have voted on a matter in an assembly shall recuse themselves from participating in the appeal.
g. A losing party that failed to appear at the judicial hearing either personally or by a representative shall not be permitted to file a claim of appeal.

Section 7: Appeal Procedures before a Classis following a Judicial Hearing before a Council

a. Within ninety (90) days of the certification of the record, the losing party from a decision of a council following a judicial hearing, including a decision in a Safe Church proceeding, may file a written claim of appeal that states the grounds for the appeal with the stated clerk of classis. A copy of the claim of appeal shall also be delivered to the opposing party, the opposing party's representative, if any, and the clerk of the council that decided the case. Upon receipt of the claim of appeal, the clerk of council shall forthwith transfer the certified record to classis. If the appeal is

from a Safe Church proceeding, the record referenced in step 12 of the Advisory Panel Process shall be the record on appeal.

b. The appeal hearing in classis shall be limited to the grounds set forth in the claim of appeal.
c. With the claim of appeal, the losing party may file a written submission in support of the claim of appeal. Portions of certified record and any other authority that supports the grounds of appeal must be clearly cited. A copy of the submission shall also be delivered to the opposing party. Except if permission is granted by classis, the written submission shall not exceed thirty (30) pages double spaced.
d. Within sixty (60) days, the opposing party may file a written response to the claim of appeal with the stated clerk of classis and also a written submission that cites from the record and any authority that supports the response. Copies of the response and submission shall also be delivered to the losing party. Except if permission is granted by classis, the written submission shall not exceed thirty (30) pages double spaced.
e. In the event of the appellant's death, the assembly may proceed with and decide the appeal if it is deemed significant for the denomination, or if the appellant's representative provides proof of reasonable necessity for deciding the appeal.
f. Classis shall schedule an appellate hearing no sooner than ninety (90) days and no later than one hundred and eighty (180) days after the date the appeal was filed and send notice of the time and date of the hearing to the parties.
g. At the appellate hearing, each party shall have the opportunity to address classis to explain their position and to answer questions of classis. The losing party shall proceed first and may reserve time to respond after the prevailing party addresses classis. Unless permission is granted, the oral presentation for each party shall be limited to thirty (30) minutes.
h. After the parties' presentations are concluded, classis shall go into strict executive session and shall immediately consider and decide the issues of the case. The final decision on any appeal shall be by majority vote of the classis as constituted.
i. Classis may affirm or reverse in whole or in part the decision of the council, or it may return the case to the council with instructions for a new partial or complete rehearing. A decision of classis that amends or overturns the decision of the council shall be written, shall state the grounds for amending or overturning, and shall be delivered to the parties. Written decisions should be sent to the parties no later than forty-five (45) days after the appellate hearing.
j. Within ninety (90) days of the issuance of the written decision, claims of appeal from a decision of classis may be filed with synod according to procedures for filing claims of appeal with classis.

Section 8: The Judicial Code Committee of Synod

a. Original hearings and appellate hearings before synod shall be referred to a Judicial Code Committee appointed by synod. This committee meets between synods as frequently as its business requires and presents its recommendations to synod in writing. Although there are some separate regulations regarding this committee in the Rules for Synodical Procedure, the committee largely functions as a normal advisory committee of synod.
b. The Judicial Code Committee shall be composed of twelve (12) members and shall reflect the diversity of the denomination. Each year four (4) persons shall be elected for terms of three (3) years. At least one (1) of these four (4) persons shall be a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor; at least one (1) shall be a person trained in the law; at least one (1) shall not be a minister of the Word or a commissioned pastor nor one trained in the law. Synod shall elect members from nominations presented by the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA. The Judicial Code Committee may recommend nominees to the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA. The terms of members shall commence July 1 following their election by synod. In the event of a vacancy on the committee because of resignation or death, the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA shall appoint a person to fill the balance of that term. Members may be reelected but shall not serve more than six consecutive years. A former member who has been off the committee for two or more years shall be eligible for election to the committee as a new member. The Judicial Code Committee shall select a chairperson and reporter from among its membership. In addition, the executive director serves as a procedural adviser to the Judicial Code Committee chairperson. Any member of the Judicial Code Committee advising a given synod may be, but need not be, a delegate to that synod.

Section 9: Hearing and Appeal Procedures before the Synod Acting in Its Judicial Capacity

a. Written charges filed with synod shall be referred to the Judicial Code Committee by the executive director of the CRC to conduct an original hearing according to the procedures of the Judicial Code.
b. Claims of appeal from decisions of classis following a judicial hearing shall also be referred to the Judicial Code Committee by the executive director of the CRC to conduct an appeal hearing according to the procedures of the Judicial Code.
c. Written charges brought against an agency, board, or committee of synod and any other matters requiring formal adjudication that synod undertakes shall also be referred by the executive director

of the CRC to the Judicial Code Committee for conducting a judicial hearing according to the procedures of the Judicial Code.

d. Claims of appeal filed with synod following an appeal hearing before classis shall also be referred to the Judicial Code Committee by the executive director of the CRC. The Judicial Code Committee shall review the claim of appeal and make a recommendation to the Council of Delegates whether the application has sufficient merit to warrant further review. No further appeal proceedings shall be conducted unless the Council of Delegates approves. If approved, the Judicial Code Committee shall conduct an appeal hearing according to the procedures of the Judicial Code.
e. The Judicial Code Committee shall present its findings of fact and recommendations, along with grounds for its recommendations to synod in writing, and they shall be openly discussed in a plenary session of synod. These written findings of fact and recommendations shall omit any disclosure of names in cases where such disclosure is judged to be potentially damaging to their reputation.
f. Either party to the dispute may request the opportunity to address synod. Such request shall be made through the Judicial Code Committee, which shall make recommendation concerning the request to synod.
g. The Judicial Code Committee may provide the officers of synod appropriate written advice on Judicial Code matters.
h. Synod may dispose of a judicial matter in one of the following ways:
    i) by deciding the matter;
    ii) by deferring it to one of its committees for settlement or reconciliation;
    iii) by remanding it with advice to the appropriate classis or council; or
    iv) by conducting its own original judicial or appeal hearing.
i. If synod conducts its own judicial or appeal hearing, it shall follow Judicial Code procedures set forth herein.

(*Acts of Synod 1977*, pp. 48-54)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 1993*, p. 499)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 484-88)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2003*, pp. 688-91)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 549)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2014*, p. 569)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 627)

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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 31

Supplement, Article 31

Synod advised the churches that a request for revision of a decision of a major assembly must be processed as far as possible in the minor assemblies before coming to the major assembly.

(*Acts of Synod 1983*, pp. 653-54)

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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 32-d

Supplement, Article 32-d

A. *Model Articles of Incorporation for Churches in the United States*

ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION

The undersigned, desiring to become incorporated, adopt the following Articles of Incorporation:

ARTICLE I
NAME OF CORPORATION

The name of this corporation (church) is

_____ _____
_____.

ARTICLE II
LOCATION

The location of the church shall be in the City of _____, County of _____, State of _____. The street address and mailing address of the registered office of the church shall be _____, _____ _____. The name of the resident agent at the registered office is _____.

ARTICLE III
FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

This church is a member church of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and recognizes the following as the fundamental principles of doctrine and government: (a) the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God and the only rule for faith and life and (b) the formulas of unity of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, namely: The Belgic Confession, The Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, and any amendments or additions as the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America ("synod") may adopt.

ARTICLE IV
PURPOSES

This church is a nonprofit, ecclesiastical corporation organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the United States Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law) (the "Code").

The church shall not carry on any other activities not permitted to be carried on (a) by a corporation exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Code or (b) by a corporation, contributions to which are deductible under Section 170(c)(2) of the Code. This church has not been formed for pecuniary profit or gain. No part of the assets, income, or profit of the church shall inure to the benefit of its members, council members, or officers. However, the church shall be authorized to pay reasonable compensation for services rendered and to make payments and distributions in furtherance of the purposes set forth in this Article IV.

No substantial part of the activities of this church shall be the carrying on of propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation. This church shall not participate in or intervene in (including the publishing or distribution of statements) any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.

ARTICLE V
CHURCH GOVERNANCE

The ecclesiastical government of the church shall be conducted in accordance with the Church Order of the Christian Reformed Church in North America as Synod shall adopt or revise (the "Church Order").

The council of this church, as defined under the Church Order, shall constitute the Board of Trustees and shall have all powers over the temporalities of this church as the Church Order and relevant state law may prescribe.

Any persons elected to the office of elder or deacon according to the Church Order and the pastor(s), if there be one or more, must be members of the church. The corporate functions related to an office shall cease on the vacating of the office, but a vacancy in the office of the pastor(s) shall in no way affect the church or the Board of Trustees.

ARTICLE VI
PROPERTY

A. **Manner in Which Held**

Except as expressly provided under this Article VI, all real and personal property shall be held exclusively in furtherance of the purposes of this church as a member church of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and in furtherance of the principles of doctrine and ecclesiastical government outlined under Articles III and V of these Articles of Incorporation and interpreted by the Classis of which the church is a member (the "Classis"), subject to review on appeal by synod, consistent with the Church Order.

B. **In the Event of Dissolution**

In the event of the disbanding of this church and the dissolution of this corporation, the church's remaining assets, if any, after the payment of its debts and expenses, shall be conveyed as the Board of Trustees may propose and as the affirmative vote of a majority of the members shall determine, subject to each of the following:

1. The Classis must approve the disbanding of this church and the dissolution of this corporation;

2. The Board of Trustees shall receive the advice of the Classis in formulating its proposal for property distribution;

3. The vote of the members shall be in accordance with the provisions of paragraph B of Article VII of these Articles of Incorporation; and

4. All remaining assets must be distributed only to one or more organizations which qualify as exempt organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Code.

C. **In the Event of Consensual Division**

In the event that a majority of the members of this church consensually agree to divide this church, with the consent of the Classis, into two (2) or more member churches of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, all real and personal property of this corporation shall be distributed as a majority vote of the members

determines in accordance with the provisions of paragraph B of Article VII of these Articles of Incorporation.

D. **In the Event of Irreconcilable Division**

In the event that the Classis (or synod on appeal) determines that an irreconcilable division (schism) has occurred within this church, the confessing members of this church who, according to the exclusive determination of the classis (or synod on appeal), remain true to the purposes of this church as a member church of the Christian Reformed Church in North America and the principles of doctrine and ecclesiastical government outlined under Articles III and V of these Articles of Incorporation shall be the lawful congregation of this church and shall have the exclusive right to hold and enjoy the real and personal property of this church. Nothing in this Article VI shall prevent the classis (or synod on appeal) from determining, in keeping with the scriptural injunction of 1 Corinthians 6, that more than one group of confessing members of this church are each a lawful congregation and dividing the real and personal property between the groups of members as classis (or synod on appeal) may determine. Classis (or Synod on appeal) also shall have the exclusive discretion to determine the circumstances which may warrant the division of the real and personal property between a group or groups of former members who choose not to remain in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

ARTICLE VII
MEMBERSHIP VOTING REQUIREMENTS FOR CERTAIN ACTIONS

A. Except as provided under paragraphs B through D of this Article VII of these Articles of Incorporation, the Board of Trustees shall have the authority to bargain, sell, convey, mortgage, lease, or release any real estate belonging to the church; to erect and repair church buildings, parsonages, schoolhouses and other buildings for the direct and legitimate use of the church; and to fix the salary of anyone in its employment.

B. No purchase, sale or conveyance, mortgage, lease, or fixing of salaries shall occur under paragraph A of this Article VII of these Articles of Incorporation unless the affirmative vote of a majority of the members of the church shall be first obtained at a meeting of the members present and entitled to vote. This meeting shall be specially called for that purpose by notice given for two successive Sundays at the usual place of meeting.

C. In the event of schism, the provisions of Article VI, D shall control the disposition of any real or personal property, and this Article VII shall not be effective.

D. No sale, mortgage, or conveyance shall be made of any gift, grant, donation, conveyance, or bequest, which would be inconsistent with the

express terms or plain intent of the grant, donation, gift, conveyance, or bequest.

ARTICLE VIII
AMENDMENTS

The Board of Trustees may at any time, by the affirmative vote of two thirds of the Trustees, adopt amendments to these Articles of Incorporation. Notwithstanding the preceding provision, the Board of Trustees shall not adopt any amendments to these Articles of Incorporation which are inconsistent with the provisions of Articles III through VIII unless approved by the Classis (or Synod on appeal).

Before any such amendment shall become effective, the Trustees shall obtain an affirmative vote of at least two thirds of the members of the church who are present and entitled to vote at a meeting specially called for that purpose, of which notice has first been given as provided for under paragraph B of Article VII of these Articles of Incorporation.

ARTICLE IX
LIMITED LIABILITY

The liability of a volunteer Trustee of the church shall be limited, eliminated, or assumed to the extent as is authorized under the relevant laws of the state in which this church is formed, except to the extent such limitation, elimination, or assumption of liability is inconsistent with the status of the church as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Code or results in the imposition of tax under Section 4958 of the Code. No amendment or repeal of this Article shall apply to or have any effect on the liability or alleged liability of any member of the Board of Trustees or officer of this church for or with respect to any acts or omissions of such trustee occurring prior to the effective date of any such amendment or repeal.

ARTICLE X
TERM

The term of this corporation is perpetual.

In witness of which, we are signing for the purpose of giving legal effect to these Articles of Incorporation:

_____

[Signature requirements will vary from state to state]

(*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 596)

Note 1: The above Articles of Incorporation can be obtained from the CRC website—www.crcna.org and search "Articles of Incorporation."

Note 2: A form of the above Articles of Incorporation modified for Michigan corporations is available from the office of the executive director or online at www.crcna.org.

B. *Model Articles of Incorporation for Churches in Canada*

1. Corporate Name

* Christian Reformed Church

2. The province or territory in Canada where the registered office is situated

_____

3. Minimum and maximum number of directors (*for a fixed number, indicate the same number in both boxes*)

minimum _____ maximum _____

4. Statement of the purpose of the corporation

The purpose of the corporation is to advance and teach the religious tenets, doctrines, observances, and culture associated with the Christian faith within the denomination of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

5. Restrictions on the activities the corporation may carry on, if any

a) The corporation shall carry on operations without pecuniary gain to its members, and any profits or other accretions to the corporation will be used in promoting its objects.

b) The corporation shall be subject to the *Charities Accounting Act.*

6. The classes, or regional or other groups, of members that the corporation is authorized to establish

The corporation is authorized to establish one class of members. Each member shall be entitled to receive notice of, attend, and vote at all meetings of the members of the corporation.

7. Statement regarding the distribution of property remaining on liquidation

Any property remaining upon liquidation, dissolution, or winding up, after payments of its liabilities, shall be distributed in the following manner:

to the classis of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to which the corporation belonged, provided that it is a qualified donee within the meaning of s.248(1) of the *Income Tax Act*; or failing that,

to another Christian Reformed Church located in the geographical vicinity of the corporation, provided that it is a qualified donee within the meaning of s.248(1) of the *Income Tax Act*; or failing that,

to the Christian Reformed Church in North America Canada Corporation, provided that it is a qualified donee within the meaning of s.248(1) of the Income Tax Act in Canada; or failing that,

to one or more qualified donees within the meaning of s.248(1) of the Income Tax Act in Canada that have similar or cognate purposes to the one herein.

8. Additional provisions, if any

a. The directors shall serve as such without remuneration, and no director shall directly or indirectly receive any profit from their positions as such, provided that directors may be paid reasonable expenses incurred by them in the performance of their duties.
b. The borrowing power of the corporation pursuant to any by-law passed and confirmed in accordance with the *Canada Not for Profit Corporations Act* shall be limited to borrowing money for current operating expenses, provided that the borrowing power of the corporation shall not be so limited if it borrows on the security of real or personal property.
c. If it is made to appear to the satisfaction of the minister, upon report of the Public Guardian and Trustee, that the corporation has failed to comply with any of the provisions of the *Charities Accounting Act*, the minister may authorize an inquiry for the purpose of determining whether or not there is sufficient cause for the Lieutenant Governor to make an order under the *Canada Not for Profit Corporations Act* to cancel the letters patent of the corporation and declare them to be dissolved.
d. To invest the funds of the corporation pursuant to the *Trustee Act*.
e. For the above objects, and as incidental and ancillary thereto, to exercise any of the powers as prescribed by the *Canada Not for Profit Corporations Act*, or by any other statutes or laws from time to time applicable, except where such power is limited by those letters patent or the statute or common law relating to charities.
f. The directors may appoint one or more directors, who shall hold office for a term expiring not later than the close of the next annual general meeting of members, but the total number of directors so appointed may not exceed one-third of the number of directors elected at the previous annual general meeting of members.

9. Declaration

I hereby certify that I am an incorporator of the Corporation

Print Names	Signatures
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Note: Churches should seek legal advice prior to adopting these Articles of Incorporation, especially as it relates to the incorporating legislation. These documents are prepared for information purposes only and use the *Canada Not-For-Profit Corporations Act (CNCA)* as the template so that they are available to *all* Canadian Christian Reformed Churches. They should be modified where necessary to conform to the laws of the province of the CR church using them as these are made for an Ontario CR church. There are many factors that may go into deciding which incorporating jurisdiction a CR church should select, and all relevant factors should be considered. Nevertheless, Ontario CR churches may choose to avoid the CNCA as it does not contemplate the existence of ex-officio directors (as the new Ontario legislation does) that are found in the model by-laws. Also, the exemption for religious corporations from the new expanded member remedies available under the CNCA has qualifications that do not exist under the similar Ontario legislation, leading some to regard Ontario as a safer harbour for some religious corporations.

(*Acts of Synod 2012*, p. 730)

Note: The above Articles of Incorporation can be obtained from the CRC website—www.crcna.org and search "Articles of Incorporation."

C. *Operating Bylaw re Property for Churches in Canada*

a. The corporation shall hold all real and personal property exclusively upon the trusts described in the Objects and in furtherance of the Fundamental Principles of the Church Doctrine and Government of the corporation as outlined in the (Letters Patent or Articles of Incorporation) of this church and as interpreted by the classis of which this church is a member (the "classis"), subject to review on appeal by the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

b. In the event of the disbanding of this church, with the approval of classis, and dissolution of this corporation, its remaining assets, if any, after the payment of its debts and expenses, shall be distributed to, and only to, one or more charities in Canada that are registered with Revenue, Taxation Canada for the purposes of the Income Tax Act of Canada and have objects similar to this corporation, in the manner proposed by the council, upon consultation with classis—and approved by the affirmative vote of a majority of the members of the church.

c. In the event of consensual division of this church by vote of its members and with the consent of the classis into two or more Christian Reformed churches, all real and personal property of this corporation shall be distributed between the two or more Christian Reformed churches as agreed to by the members, subject to the review of said distribution by classis (or synod on appeal).

d. In the event that the classis (or synod on appeal) determines that an irreconcilable division (schism) has occurred within this church, the confessing members of this church who, according to the exclusive determination of classis (or synod on appeal), remain true to the Objects, the principles of doctrine and ecclesiastical government, as set out in the (Letters Patent or Articles of Incorporation), shall be the lawful congregation of this church and shall constitute the sole membership of this corporation which shall have the exclusive right to hold and continue to hold and enjoy the real and personal property of this church. Nothing in this Article ____, however, shall prevent the classis (or synod on appeal) from determining, in keeping with the scriptural injunction of I Corinthians 6, that more than one group of confessing members of this church are each a lawful congregation and from dividing the real and personal property among this church and such other lawful congregation(s) having the same or similar objects and arising from this church in such proportion as classis (or synod on appeal) may determine.

(*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 620)

D. *Model General Operating Bylaw Number 1 for Churches in Canada*

A model bylaw for churches in Canada has been prepared and approved by synod. A copy may be obtained from the office of the executive director or from the CRC website—www.crcna.org and search "Bylaw Canada."

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 the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA, to act for them in matters which cannot await 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 officebearers who are delegated by their 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 the delegate or the church of which the delegate is a member is particularly involved.

B. The Council

Article 35

a. In every church there shall be a council composed of the minister(s), the elders, and the deacons. Those tasks which belong to the common administration of the church, such as promoting its mission, calling a pastor, approving nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern, are the responsibility of the council.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 35-a

b. In every church there shall be a consistory composed of the elders and the minister(s) of the Word. Those tasks which belong distinctively to the office of elder are the responsibility of the consistory. The consistory shall give an account of its work to the council.

c. In every church there shall be a diaconate composed of the deacons of the church. Those tasks which belong distinctively to the office of deacon are the responsibility of the diaconate. The diaconate shall give an account of its work to the council.

Supplement, Article 35-a

The council is responsible for preparing the annual budget of the congregation, including classical and denominational ministry shares for presentation to the congregation for its approval.

(*Acts of Synod 1992*, p. 711)

Article 36

a. The council, consistory, and diaconate shall ordinarily meet at least once a month, at a time and place announced to the congregation. Each body shall select its own president and other officers.

b. The council, at least four times per year, shall exercise mutual censure, in which officebearers assess and encourage each other in the performance of their official duties.

Article 37

The council, besides seeking the cooperation of the congregation in the election of officebearers, 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 council shall call a meeting at least annually of all members entitled to vote. Such a meeting shall be conducted by the council, 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 council as the governing body of the church, except in those matters stipulated otherwise in the articles of incorporation or by law.

—Cf. Article 59-b and -c

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

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

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-b

c. When a non-Christian Reformed congregation wishes to affiliate with the Christian Reformed Church, including the transfer of its pastor and other ministry staff, the procedure and regulations established by synod shall be followed.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-c

d. When a council and congregation decide to disband or revert to unorganized status, the approval of classis is required. If any distribution of assets is required, the congregation and council shall consult with classis.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-d

e. When two or more councils and congregations decide to merge, the approval of classis is required.

f. When a council decides to disaffiliate from the denomination, the set process for disaffiliation adopted by synod shall be followed.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-f

g. Particular churches of the Christian Reformed Church in North America may unite to form union congregations with one or more particular congregations of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship, with the approval of classis.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-g

h. Particular churches of the Christian Reformed Church in North America may affiliate with one or more additional denominations in ecclesiastical fellowship, with the approval of classis and with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 38-h

Supplement, Article 38-b

a. Ordinarily the congregation shall have been in existence at least three years.

b. The congregation shall include a sufficient number of members who meet the biblical requirements for church office and are committed to use their personal and spiritual gifts in providing leadership and support to the congregation and its ministry.

c. The congregation exercises financial stewardship for the continuing development and effectiveness of its ministry

and, prior to organization, provides the classis with financial information that reflects its capacity and commitment toward financial self-support, including personnel expenses and classical and denominational ministry shares.

d. The community in which the congregation is located offers the potential for continuing ministry, and the congregation gives evidence of its continuing commitment to fulfill the great commission with the resources and opportunities God gives.

(*Acts of Synod 2005,* pp. 762-63)

Supplement, Article 38-c

Synod 2016 endorsed a revised Affiliation Process and Procedure for congregations that desire to affiliate with the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The process and procedure document for such affiliation as described in the Candidacy Committee's "Journey Toward Ordination" document is included in the "Manual for Synodical Deputies" and has been provided for every stated clerk of classis.

(Adapted from *Agenda for Synod 2006*, pp. 64-70, and *Acts of Synod 2006*, p. 680; *Acts of Synod 2016,* p. 845)

Supplement, Article 38-d

If a church has diminished to fewer than forty-five active confessing members or shows that it lacks a sufficient number of members who can provide leadership or it can no longer meet its financial obligations or there is no prospect of continued growth, then a classis should consider that these are sufficient indicators for it to begin discussing with such a congregation whether it is still appropriate for it to retain organized status.

(*Acts of Synod 2005,* p. 763)

Supplement, Article 38-f

A local congregation may disaffiliate from the denomination only according to the following procedure:

a. A church council which adopts a resolution to disaffiliate from the denomination shall inform its classis of its actions, ordinarily at the next scheduled meeting of classis. The council shall provide written grounds for its intention to withdraw.

b. Classis shall appoint representatives to meet with the council to attempt to dissuade the council from such action. Representatives of classis shall have the opportunity to meet in person with the council and to present written rebuttal to the council's grounds. Meetings between the council and

classical representatives shall continue no longer than two months unless both parties agree to a continuation.

c. If the council is not dissuaded by the classical representatives and wishes to continue the disaffiliation process, the council shall issue a call for a congregational meeting. It will present together with this call its written grounds for disaffiliation and any written rebuttal presented by the classical representatives.

d. Representatives of classis shall be informed of the time and location of congregational meetings at which a congregation's withdrawal from the denomination is being considered and shall be given opportunity to persuade the congregation to remain within the denomination.

e. At the congregational meeting a preliminary vote may be taken following the discussion. If a majority favors withdrawal, a second meeting to confirm this decision shall be scheduled no earlier than one month and no later than one year following.

f. If the second congregational vote favors disaffiliation and the council follows through on its decision to disaffiliate, classis shall provide for the pastoral care of those members who wish to remain within the denomination.

g. If the congregation wishes to disaffiliate from the denomination, classis (and synod upon appeal) shall settle any disputes between differing factions within the disaffiliating congregation. The separation will be complete when classis (or synod upon appeal) declares it acquiesces in the decision of the congregation to disaffiliate from the denomination.

(*Acts of Synod 1997*, pp. 613-14)

Supplement, Article 38-g

Provisions for forming union churches

1. The following plan of union shall be adopted by particular churches forming a union church:

   a. The following plan of union is adopted by the _____ Christian Reformed Church of _____, effective as of the date when each of the congregations has approved the plan by a two-thirds majority of those present at a regularly called congregational meeting with such notice and quorum as is required by the constitution of each church and when the classis (presbytery) of each church has approved the particular union and this plan of union.

   b. The purpose of this union is to provide for the worship of almighty God, instruction in the Christian faith, and outreach

and diaconal ministry by a united congregation which will share the property, real and personal, of the uniting churches and provide for the services of a minister or ministers for the united church.

c. The united church shall be known as the _____ Church of _____.

d. The united church shall be subject to the constitution of each church involved as set forth in subsections *r*, *s*, *u*, and *v*.

e. The council (session) shall submit its records annually, and whenever requested, to each broader assembly (judicatory).

f. The membership of the united church shall consist of those who were members of the uniting churches, plus those received by the council (session) of the united church.

g. The council (session) of the united church shall report an equal share of the total membership to each broader assembly (judicatory), and such membership shall be published in the minutes/acts/directory of the synod/general assembly with a note to the effect that the report is that of a union church and with an indication of the total actual membership. A report of additional vital congregational information shall be made by the council (session) and properly noted by each (general) assembly.

h. Initially the officers of the united church (elders and deacons) shall be those officers in active service of the uniting churches, who will undertake to perform their responsibilities under the constitution of each church, as indicated in subsections *d* above and *r*, *s*, *u*, and *v* below.

i. At the first annual meeting subsequent to the effective date of the union, new officers shall be elected by the united congregation to replace the officers noted in subsection *h* above according to the constitutional procedure in force as a consequence of subsection *v* below.

j. The pastoral relations of the ministers of the uniting churches shall be dissolved automatically by the action of the classis (presbytery) in approving this plan, but they may be eligible to be ministers (pastors) of the united church according to the election of the united congregation.

k. The minister/s of the united church shall be full and responsible members of each assembly (judicatory) of immediate jurisdiction and shall be subject to discipline as provided below in subsection *s*.

l. The united church shall cause a corporation to be formed under the appropriate laws of the state, where permissible. The corporation shall include in its articles or charter the

substance of subsections *b*, *c*, and *d* above and the confessional standards of the uniting churches.

m. All property of the uniting churches, real and personal, shall be transferred to the corporation formed in section *l* above. The new corporation shall be the legal successor of the corporations, if any, of the uniting churches, and it shall be bound to administer any trust property or monies received in accordance with the provisions of the original establishment of the trust. All liabilities of the uniting churches shall be liabilities of the united church. In any state/ province where a church corporation is forbidden, the purposes of this section shall be achieved in harmony with the law of that state.

n. Trustees of the corporation (or the unincorporated body) shall be elected in harmony with civil law according to the constitutional provisions outlined in subsection *d* above, as interpreted by subsection *v* below.

o. While recognizing the basic right of any giver to designate the cause or causes to which the gift shall go, the council (session) of the united church shall annually propose to the congregation a general mission or benevolence program which shall be divided equitably among the officially approved causes of each denomination. The proportions shall be as the council (session) shall decide in response to the request of the broader assemblies (judicatories).

p. Per capita ministry shares (apportionments) shall be paid to each classis (presbytery) and to synod (general assembly) on the basis of the total communicant membership of the union church, equally divided among the denominations involved.

q. All members of the united church shall be under the discipline of the elders (session) according to rules agreed upon in harmony with the constitution of each denomination where they coincide, in harmony with the mandatory provisions of the constitution of one denomination where the others are permissive, and at the choice of the elders (session) where they may be contradictory.

r. Appeals against the actions of the council (session) shall be made to one assembly or judicatory only (presbytery or classis), at the choice of the members, and all subsequent appeals or complaints shall be in the assemblies of the members' original choice, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on the council (session) and on the members.

s. The minister/s shall be subject to the discipline of the council/classis/presbytery provided that when an assembly begins an action, it shall invite a committee from the others to join in formulating and pressing the charges. In the event

of appeal, the case shall be finally decided by the broadest assembly to which the appeal is taken in the church which commenced the action, and that decision shall be equally binding on the council/classis/presbytery.

t. The minister/s shall participate in the denominational pension plan of one of the churches. If already participating in a plan, the minister/s shall remain in that plan. If there has been no participation in any pension plan, the minister/s may choose which denominational plan to join.

u. Protests/complaints against the actions of the council (session) may be taken under the constitutional provisions of only one denomination, according to the choice of the complainant; once a complaint is registered with an assembly (judicatory), no other denomination shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.

v. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions (except as provided in subsection *q* above), the council (session) of the united church shall petition the assemblies (judicatories) of immediate jurisdiction to overture their respective broadest assembly to resolve the conflict either by authoritative interpretations or by constitutional amendment.

w. A union church may be dissolved by a two-thirds vote of two congregational meetings held not less than one year and not more than two years apart, subject to the concurrence of the classes (presbyteries) involved. In case of dissolution of a union church, all property of the united church, real and personal, shall be divided equally between the classes (the presbytery and the classis) of jurisdiction.

2. No provision in this document shall be construed as modifying or amending the church order/constitution of this church in its application to any but union churches organized under this provision, their members, officers, or ministers.

(*Acts of Synod 1998*, p. 379)

Supplement, Article 38-h

The following plan for affiliation shall be adopted by a particular church to affiliate with one or more denominations in ecclesiastical fellowship:

a. The following plan is adopted by the _____ Christian Reformed Church of _____, effective as of the date when the congregation has approved the plan by a two-thirds majority of those present at a regularly called congregational meeting with such notice and quorum as is

required by its rules of procedure and when the local classis of the CRC and the local governing body of the additional denomination have approved the particular plan of affiliation.

b. The purpose of this affiliation is to provide for the worship of almighty God, instruction in the Christian faith, and outreach and diaconal ministry by a congregation which is organizing as a dual or multiaffiliated church.

c. The dual or multiaffiliated church shall be known as the _____ Church.

d. The dual or multiaffiliated church shall be subject to the Church Order/Constitution of each denomination involved as set forth in subsections *m, n, p,* and *q* below.

e. The council shall annually report its active membership count and other statistics to the respective denominations as required by each denomination.

f. In the case of an organized church, initially the officers (elders and deacons) shall be those officers in active service at the time of the change in affiliation. They will undertake to perform their responsibilities as indicated in subsections *d* above and *m, n, p,* and *q* below.

g. Following the change in affiliation in an organized church, or when an emerging church organizes as a dual or multiaffiliated church, officers will be elected according to the rules of procedure approved in the resulting church.

h. The minister(s) of the resulting church shall be full and responsible members of each assembly (judicatory) of immediate jurisdiction and shall be subject to discipline as provided below in subsection *n*.

i. The dual or multiaffiliated church shall make changes in its Articles of Incorporation to include the substance of subsections *b, c,* and *d* and the confessional standards of the affiliated churches.

j. While recognizing the basic right of any giver to designate the cause or causes to which a gift shall go, the council of the dual or multiaffiliated church shall annually propose to the congregation a general mission or benevolence program which shall be divided equitably among the officially approved causes of each denomination. The proportions shall be as the council shall decide in response to the request of the broader assemblies (judicatories).

k. Per capita ministry shares (assessments) shall be paid to each classis and synod (and equivalent governing bodies) on the basis of the total confessing membership of the church, equally divided among the denominations involved.

l. All members of the church shall be under the discipline of the elders, according to rules agreed upon in harmony with the Church Order/Constitution of each denomination where they coincide, and in harmony with the mandatory provisions of the Church Order/Constitution of one denomination where the other is permissive, and at the choice of the elders where the provisions may be contradictory.

m. Appeals against the actions of the council shall be made to one assembly or judicatory only (classis), at the choice of the members, and all subsequent appeals or complaints shall be in the assemblies of the members' original choice, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on the council and on the members.

n. The minister(s) shall be subject to the discipline of the council and the governing assemblies of the denomination within which that minister is ordained, provided that when an assembly begins an action, it shall invite a committee from the others to join in formulating and pressing the charges. In the event of appeal, the case shall be finally decided by the broadest assembly to which the appeal is taken in the church which commenced the action, and that decision shall be equally binding on the council and classis.

o. The minister(s) shall participate in the denominational pension plan of the denomination within which that minister is ordained and in compliance with its requirements.

p. Protests/complaints against the actions of the council may be taken under the Church Order/Constitutional provisions of only one denomination, according to the choice of the complainant; once a complaint is registered with an assembly (judicatory), no other denomination shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.

q. The plan of affiliation that is formed may be dissolved by a two-thirds vote of the congregation at two separate congregational meetings held not less than one year and not more than two years apart, subject to the concurrence of the classes (regional assemblies) involved. In case of dissolution of the plan, all property of the church, real and personal, shall be divided according to a formula established at the time of purchase or the plan of affiliation. If a written formula does not exist, then the acquired property shall be divided equally between the classes (regional assemblies) of jurisdiction, unless a classis or presbytery chooses to waive its right to the property.

r. Wherever the Church Order/Constitution of the denominations differs, the mandatory provisions of one

shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions (except as provided in subsection *l* above), the council of the dual or multiaffiliated church shall petition the assemblies (judicatories) of immediate jurisdiction to overture their respective broadest assembly to resolve the conflict either by authoritative interpretations or by Church Order/constitutional amendment.

s. No provision in this document shall be construed as modifying or amending the Church Order/Constitution of this church in its application to any but dual or multiaffiliated churches organized under this provision, their members, officers, or ministers.

(*Acts of Synod 2015*, pp. 648-49)

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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 39

Note: The following changes (in *italics*) will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

A classis is a group of Christian Reformed churches that come together to seek, discern, and submit to God's will; offer one another mutual support and accountability; find ways to live out a collective calling within their region; and allow for a healthy and sustained connection to the wider denomination. A classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches. The organization of a new classis and the redistricting of classes require the approval of synod.

Supplement, Article 39

The classis, through its treasurer, is responsible for the receipt and disbursement of classical and denominational funds, the more prosperous churches assisting the more needy ones.

(*Acts of Synod 1992*, p. 711)

Any request for transfer to another classis may include grounds that go beyond the sole matter of geographic proximity; synod is at liberty to consider such grounds in its disposition of the request.

(*Acts of Synod 1996*, pp. 561)

a. The council of each church shall delegate a minister, an elder, and a deacon to the classis. If a church is without a minister, or the minister is prevented from attending, another elder shall be delegated in place of the minister. Officebearers who are not delegated may also attend classis and may be given an advisory voice.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 40-a

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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 40-b

c. The ministers shall preside in rotation, or a president may be elected from among the delegates; however, ordinarily the same person shall not preside twice in succession.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 40-a and -c

Supplement, Article 40-a

a. When great distances or other weighty reasons make it impractical for a church to send three delegates to the classis, a council may opt to send two delegates.

b. The gender of delegates to a classis shall be consistent with the decisions of that classis concerning the supplement to Article 3-a of the Church Order. Delegates who believe the seating of women delegates is in violation of the Word of God may record their protest on the appropriate credentials. Their names, along with their protests, shall be included in the official record of each classis meeting. If a classis so desires, it may also invite emerging churches to delegate three officebearers to the meetings of classis.

(*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 621)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 612)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 613)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 657)

Supplement, Article 40-b

Any classical decision requiring the concurrence of the synodical deputies shall be made in the presence of delegates from all the churches which are members of the classis in which the action is being taken. If a classis contracta is necessary because of justifiable circumstances, to be determined in consultation with the deputies, a contracted classis shall never be convened with fewer than half the churches represented. A quorum for a classis contracta shall be half the churches of a classis plus one.

(*Acts of Synod 2000*, p. 668)

Supplement, Article 40-a and -c

Modification for Churches of Classis Red Mesa

a. The council of each church shall delegate a minister, an elder, and a deacon to the classis. If a church is without a minister, or a minister, elder, or deacon delegate is prevented from attending, any combination of three officebearers may be delegated. Officebearers who are not delegated also may attend classis and may be given an advisory voice.

c. The presiding officers of classis shall be selected from officebearers within the classis. Ordinarily the same presiding officers shall not be chosen twice in succession.

(*Acts of Synod 1981*, p. 16)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2015*, p. 657)

Article 41

In order to assist the churches, the classis shall allocate sufficient time at its meetings to respond to requests for advice or help from the churches and, at a minimum of one of its meetings annually, shall allocate sufficient time to discuss at least one ministry issue that the classis considers to be especially important in the life and ministry of member congregations in the denomination.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 41

Supplement, Article 41

Synod revised the Classical Credential Form by adding the following sentence to the top half of the form:

> We testify that our council faithfully adheres to the doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church and diligently and effectively attends to ministry within our congregation, community, classis, denomination, and the broader kingdom of God.

Article 42

a. The classis shall be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel and advice to churches. The classis shall appoint church visitors to visit each church in classis on a yearly basis. The classis shall appoint classical counselors to provide advice to any church in the process of calling a minister of the Word.

Note: The following changes to Article 42-a (indicated by strikethrough and *italics*) will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

a. The classis shall be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel ~~and advice~~ to churches *and to pastors*. The classis shall appoint church

visitors to visit each church in classis on a yearly basis. The classis shall appoint classical counselors to provide advice to any church in the process of calling a minister of the Word. *The classis shall appoint regional pastors to support ministers of the Word and commissioned pastors.*

b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of officebearers chosen for their experience and counsel. Team composition shall include a minister of the Word and at least one other officebearer. Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 42-b

c. The classical counselor's task is to ensure that a church in the process of calling a minister of the Word observes ecclesiastical regulations and sound process. The counselor shall be an officebearer, normally a minister of the Word, whose ministerial credentials or membership resides in a congregation other than the church in the process of calling a minister. The classical counselor shall provide classis with a written report during and after the calling process.

Note: The following addition of Article 42-d (in *italics*) will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

d. The regional pastor's task is to support and encourage all who are pastors and to ensure that newly ordained pastors in the CRC are engaged in a mentoring relationship.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 42-d

Supplement, Article 42-b

That synod encourage classes to emphasize the importance of church visiting, thereby acknowledging its value for maintaining spiritual health and vitality in the member congregations of the classis, and encourage the use of the *Guide for Conducting Church Visiting* (found at crcna.org) and/or other resources available from the Office of Pastor Church Resources as effective tools to that end.

(*Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 596)

Note: The following changes (in *italics*) will be considered by Synod 2019 for adoption:

Proposed Supplement, Article 42-d

1. Regional pastors shall be appointed for a specified term of service.
2. Regional pastors shall be appointed in collaboration with Pastor Church Resources.

3. Regional pastor expenses shall ordinarily be borne by the classis.
4. Annual written reports of the regional pastor shall be provided to classis and copied to Pastor Church Resources.
5. General oversight of the regional pastor program, including development of resource materials and training, will be coordinated by Pastor Church Resources.
6. Regional pastors assist newly ordained pastors in the selection of a mentor, according to the decision of synod:

a. All candidates for ministry will upon ordination engage with a mentor. Each newly ordained minister will be served by a mentor for the first five years of ministry.

b. For the first five years of ministry of each person who enters the Christian Reformed Church ministry by way of Church Order Articles 7, 8, or 14-e, engaging with a mentor will be required.

c. A mentor will be provided for any minister of the Word who desires a mentor.

(Adapted from Acts of Synod 1982, *p. 78)*

Article 43

a. Every classis shall maintain a student fund and a Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (CMLT) to provide support and encouragement for individuals preparing for ministry in the Christian Reformed Church.

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

Article 44

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

b. Classes engaging in matters of mutual concern may organize themselves into an ecclesiastical assembly that will function on the level of classis, with freedom to determine the delegation from the constituent classes and the frequency of meetings. Such an assembly's authority, jurisdiction, and mandate shall be approved by synod. It shall have direct access to synod in all matters pertaining to its mandate.

D. The Synod

Article 45

Synod is the assembly representing the churches of all the classes. Each classis shall delegate one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer to synod.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 45

Supplement, Article 45

a. Denominational Funding

1. The synod shall annually review the unified denominational budget as proposed by the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA and approve a ministry-share assignment to provide the revenue for that budget.
2. Synod shall review the annual budgets of the denominational agencies.
3. Following each annual synod, the executive director shall inform the classical treasurers as to their respective denominational ministry shares.

(Adapted from *Acts of Synod 1992*, p. 711)

b. Regulations pertaining to the choosing of delegates to synod and synodical deputies

1. Delegates who believe the seating of (or election of) women delegates (or synodical deputies) is in violation of the Word of God may record their protest on the appropriate credentials. Their names, along with protests, shall be recorded in the minutes of synod.
2. Commissioned pastors serving as a solo pastor of an organized congregation may be sent as a ministerial delegate to synod and nominated to serve in other denominational functions where a person must normally be a minister of the Word.

(*Acts of Synod 2007*, pp. 612, 665)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 2009*, pp. 613-14)

3. Commissioned pastors serving in emerging churches and associate staff positions may be delegated as elder delegates to synod and nominated to serve in other denominational functions where a person must normally be an elder.

(*Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 559-60)

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 Council of Delegates of the CRCNA, 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, and of the principles and elements of worship. Synod shall approve the liturgical forms, the *Psalter Hymnal,* and the Bible versions suitable for use in worship. 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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 47

Supplement, Article 47

Regulations Pertaining to Article 47 of the Church Order

a. A substantial alteration is any alteration which changes the essential meaning of the creeds or the articles of the Church Order or which changes the church's regulation of its worship through the adopted liturgical forms, *Psalter Hymnal*, principles and elements of worship, or the designated Bible versions to be used in the worship services. A committee recommending any change in these matters shall specify what change is being recommended and shall state whether or not the change is a "substantial alteration."

b. *Prior opportunity* is understood as sufficient time for churches and classes to be able to respond to a substantial alteration with overtures or other communications to synod before the substantial alteration is adopted. Generally, churches and classes have prior opportunity in the case of study committee reports because such reports are received by November 1 of the year before synod meets. Generally, churches and classes do not have prior opportunity in the case of standing-committee reports and overtures because the printed *Agenda for Synod* is received only two months before synod meets and one month after the majority of the classes have had their last meetings before synod.

c. If the churches and classes have not had prior opportunity to consider a substantial alteration, it must be submitted to a following synod, which will consider its advisability. The first decision shall be understood as a decision to propose; the action of a following synod shall be understood as a decision to adopt.

   1) A proposed change may not be implemented until it is adopted by a following synod. It has no effect on any other synodical decisions until it is adopted.

   2) A proposed change has the same status as the recommendation of a study committee. The synod proposing the change may designate a person(s) to represent the change at the synod to which it is submitted for adoption. The proposed change and its representatives have all the rights and privileges of the recommendations and representatives of a synodical study committee.

3) If a proposed change is rejected by a following synod, that change (or one substantially similar) is not available for adoption by a succeeding synod unless it has been first proposed once again by synod.

d. Changes to Church Order Supplements are not subject to the above requirements.

(*Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 755-56)
(Amended *Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 500)

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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 48-a

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.

Supplement, Article 48-a

A classis may appoint a female minister to serve as a synodical deputy as long as, out of consideration for neighboring classes, a male minister is the alternate.

(*Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 612)

Article 49

a. Synod shall appoint a committee to encourage ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches, especially those that are part of the Reformed family, as articulated in the synodically approved Ecumenical Charter of the Christian Reformed Church 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 designate the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church is in ecclesiastical fellowship, the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church is in dialogue, and the ecumenical organizations in which the Christian Reformed Church holds membership or significantly participates.

Article 50

a. Synod shall send delegates to ecumenical bodies in which the Christian Reformed Church cooperates with other Christian denominations, particularly those sharing the Reformed perspective.

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

c. Decisions of ecumenical bodies 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, ordinarily 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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 51-a

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.

Supplement, Article 51-a

a. Synod affirms the rich tradition of assembling for worship twice on the Lord's Day and encourages existing congregations to continue and new congregations to embrace this tradition for the building up of the body of Christ.

b. Where congregations are exploring alternatives to the second service, synod encourages those congregations to ensure that such alternatives are part of a strategic ministry plan with full accountability to their classis.

(*Acts of Synod 1995*, pp. 766-67)

Article 52

a. The consistory shall regulate the worship services.

b. The consistory shall see to it that the principles and elements of worship approved by synod are observed, including the use of liturgical forms, songs, and synodically approved Bible versions. If liturgical forms are adapted or additional psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are used in worship, these elements should conform to synodical guidelines.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 52-b

Supplement, Article 52-b

- **Bible versions** recommended by synod for use in worship services are listed online at www.crcna.org and include the King James Version (KJV), the American Standard Version (ASV), the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New International Version (NIV), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Today's New International Version (TNIV), the English Standard Version (ESV), and the New Living Translation (NLT).
- **Liturgical forms, songs, and elements of worship** approved by synod are contained in the latest edition (currently 1987) of the denomination's *Psalter Hymnal*. Forms, subsequent revisions of forms that are synodically approved, and other such resources are made available on the denomination's website (www.crcna.org) under "Synod Resources."
- Synodical guidelines pertaining to the **adaptation of liturgical forms** are found in the *Acts of Synod 1994*, pages 493-94, and in the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government*.
- Materials on the **principles of, elements of, and guidelines for worship and music** are found in the "Introduction to the Psalms, Bible Songs, and Hymns" contained in the latest edition (currently 1987) of the denomination's *Psalter Hymnal*, pages 11-13; in the *Acts of Synod 1997*, pages 664-68; and in the 1997 Committee to Study Worship Report available on the denomination's website (www.crcna.org) under "Synod Resources."

Article 53

a. The worship services shall be led by the ministers of the Word and others appointed by the consistory.

b. Worship services may be led by persons licensed to exhort or by those appointed by the consistory to read a sermon. Such persons, however, shall refrain from all official acts of ministry, and only sermons approved by the consistory shall be read in a worship service.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 53

Supplement, Article 53

"Official Acts of Ministry"

1) Certain acts of ministry—among them the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, the pronouncement of blessings for the people, the laying of hands on new leaders, and the reception and formal dismissal of members—are part of the ministry of Christ to his followers and are entrusted to the church and, within the church, to its ordained leaders, not to a specific office.

2) Therefore, no long-standing, organized congregation of Christians should be deprived of these liturgical acts simply because it cannot provide for the presence of an ordained minister or commissioned pastor.
3) These acts of ministry symbolize and strengthen the relationships among the Lord, leaders, and the people of God. Their use is a sacred trust given to leaders by the Lord for the purpose of strengthening the flock. Therefore the administration of these acts should continue to be regulated by the church.

(*Acts of Synod 2001*, p. 504)

Article 54

a. The proclamation of the Word shall be central to the worship of the church and shall be guided by the creeds and confessions.

b. At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the creeds and confessions of the church, especially the Heidelberg Catechism.

Article 55

The sacraments shall be administered upon the authority of the consistory in the public worship service by a minister of the Word, a commissioned pastor, or, in the case of need, an ordained person who has received the approval of classis, with the use of the prescribed forms or adaptations of them that conform to synodical guidelines.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 55

Supplement, Article 55

a. Classis approval is required for an ordained person to administer the sacraments.

b. Ordinarily the ordained person should be an elder.

(*Acts of Synod 2002*, p. 537)

Article 56

The covenant of God shall be sealed to children of confessing members by holy baptism. The consistory shall see to it that baptism is requested and administered as soon as feasible. Upon their baptism, children shall be designated as "baptized member."

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. All baptized members who come with age- and ability-appropriate faith in Jesus Christ are welcome to the Lord's Supper and called to obey the scriptural commands about participation in an age- and ability-appropriate way under the supervision of the elders.

b. Baptized members shall be encouraged to make a public profession of faith with the use of a prescribed form in a public worship service. This public profession of faith includes a commitment to the creeds and confessions of the Christian Reformed Church. Before their profession of faith, they shall give an appropriate testimony of their faith, life, and doctrine to the elders. The names of those who will make a public profession of faith shall be announced to the congregation for approval at least one Sunday before their profession takes place. Upon their public profession of faith, they shall be designated as "confessing members."

c. Confessing members receive all the privileges and responsibilities of such membership. Privileges include but are not limited to presentation of children for holy baptism, the right to vote at congregational meetings, and eligibility to hold office. Responsibilities include full participation in the work, life, and mutual discipline of the local congregation and the universal body of Christ.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 59-c

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

e. Confessing members coming from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted as confessing members of the congregation upon the presentation of certificates or statements of membership after the consistory has satisfied itself concerning the doctrine and conduct of the members.

f. Persons coming from other denominations shall be admitted as confessing members of the congregation 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.

Supplement, Article 59-c

Each congregation shall determine the appropriate age at which a confessing member shall receive such privileges and responsibilities.

(*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 829)

Article 60

The Lord's Supper shall be administered at least once every three months in a manner conducive to building up the body of Christ and in keeping with the teachings of God's Word.

Article 61

The public prayers in the worship service shall include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, supplication, and intercession.

Article 62

Opportunity shall be given regularly, as part of worship, to offer gifts, both financial and otherwise, to develop and sustain ministries of the congregation, locally within its own community, the shared ministries of the denomination globally, and other causes that the church supports.

B. Faith Nurture

Article 63

a. Each church shall minister to its children and youth—and to the children and youth in the community who participate—by nurturing their personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, by nurturing their faithful participation in the Lord's Supper, by preparing them to profess their faith publicly, and by equipping them to assume their Christian responsibilities in the church and in the world. This nurturing ministry shall include receiving them in love, praying for them, instructing them in the faith, and encouraging and sustaining them in the fellowship of believers.

b. Each church shall instruct the youth in the Scriptures and in the creeds and the confessions of the church, especially the Heidelberg Catechism. This instruction shall be supervised by the consistory.

Article 64

a. Each church shall minister to its adult members so as to increase their knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to nurture a mature faith in Christ, to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers, and to equip them to fulfill their calling in the church and in the world.

b. Each church shall provide opportunities for continued instruction of adult members. This instruction shall be supervised by the consistory.

C. Pastoral Care

Article 65

The officebearers of the church shall extend pastoral care to all members of the congregation and to others whenever possible. Home visitation and other methods, such as spiritual mentorship and personal contact, shall be used to encourage them to live by faith, restore those who err in doctrine or life, and comfort and assist those experiencing adversity.

Article 66

a. Confessing members who move to another Christian Reformed church or to a church in ecclesiastical fellowship are entitled to a certificate, issued by the council, 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. Baptized members who move to another Christian Reformed church or to a church in ecclesiastical fellowship shall upon proper request be granted a certificate of baptism, to which such notations as are necessary shall be attached. Such certificates shall ordinarily be mailed to the church of their new residence.

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

Article 67

Members who move to localities where there is no Christian Reformed church and no church in ecclesiastical fellowship 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

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.
2. This regulation shall supersede the rules of 1881 and 1910.

(*Acts of Synod 1974*, pp. 81-82)

Rules for Lapsing of Nonattending and Nonsupporting 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 the person's membership, the consistory may declare that person's membership has lapsed. This may be done when all the following conditions are present:

a. The person claims to be still committed to the Christian faith.

b. The person claims to be worshiping elsewhere.

c. The consistory is not aware of any public sin requiring discipline.

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)

Article 68

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

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.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 69-c

Supplement, Article 69-c

The pastoral guidance recommended to the churches by Synod 2016, found in the minority report of the Committee to Provide Pastoral Guidance re Same-sex Marriage (*Agenda for Synod 2016*, pp. 436-43), represents one example of how synod has determined that a marriage is considered to be in conflict with the Word of God.

(cf. *Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 918)

Article 70

Funerals and memorial services within the body of Christ should reflect the confidence of our faith and should be conducted accordingly. Such times provide opportunities to minister love, provide comfort, give instruction, and offer hope to the bereaved.

Article 71

The council shall diligently encourage the members of the congregation to establish and maintain good Christian schools in which the biblical,

Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation is clearly taught. The council shall also urge parents to have their children educated in harmony with this vision according to the demands of the covenant.

Article 72

The council shall promote and supervise groups within the congregation for the study of God's Word, for prayer, and for the enhancement of fellowship, discipleship, and service.

D. Ministries of the Church

Article 73

In joyful obedience to the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, the church is called to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his kingdom through word and deed.

Article 74

a. Each church shall proclaim the gospel to its community. The local church is to announce and demonstrate, through word and deed, that God's reign has come; to live as an exhibit of God's healing and reconciling grace; and to extend to all the invitation to experience new life in Christ through repentance and faith.

b. The council shall be responsible to develop a vision and provide training and leadership to equip the church to fulfill its unique evangelistic and diaconal calling. Churches are encouraged to work with neighboring churches, appropriate community resources, classical and denominational resources, and other gifts the Lord has provided to help accomplish their tasks.

c. Each council shall encourage the members of the congregation to support denominational and classical ministries by their interest, prayers, and gifts.

d. Each church shall ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates.

Article 75

a. The classes shall implement a ministry plan that advances evangelistic and diaconal witness to Christ and his kingdom in its specific region and, when necessary, assist those churches needing support to fulfill their mission.

b. Each classis shall ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates.

Article 76

a. Synod shall encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of word and deed witness to Christ and his kingdom. Synod shall also appoint denominational ministries that engage churches and classes in ministries that are local, national, binational, and global.

b. Synod shall ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates.

Article 77

Synod shall regulate the work of denominational ministries by way of the Governance Handbook and decisions of the Council of Delegates of the CRCNA.

IV. THE ADMONITION AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH

A. General Provisions

Article 78

The purpose of admonition and discipline is to restore those who err to faithful obedience to God and full fellowship with the congregation, to maintain the holiness of the church, and thus to uphold God's honor.

Article 79

a. The members of the church are accountable to one another in their doctrine and life and have the responsibility to encourage and admonish one another in love.

b. The consistory shall encourage a spirit of mutual accountability, calling the congregation away from favoritism, division, and selfishness toward hospitality, forgiveness, and unity within the body, especially in conjunction with participation in the Lord's Supper as mandated in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

c. The consistory shall instruct and remind the members of the church of their responsibility and foster a spirit of love and openness within the fellowship so that erring members may be led to repentance and reconciliation.

Article 80

The consistory shall exercise the authority which Christ has given to his church regarding sins of a public nature or those brought to its attention according to the rule of Matthew 18:15-17.

B. The Admonition and Discipline of Members

Article 81

a. Members who have sinned in life or doctrine shall be faithfully discipled by the consistory and, if they persist in their sin, shall be excluded from membership in the church of Christ.

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

c. Confessing members who have been excluded from membership in the church shall be received again into its fellowship upon repentance of their sin.

d. The consistory shall inform the congregation and encourage its involvement in both the exclusion from and the readmission to membership.

—Cf. Supplement, Articles 78-81

Supplement, Articles 78-81

a. Discipline shall be applied by the consistory only after an adequate investigation has been made and the member has had ample opportunity to present his/her case.

b. A person who persistently rejects the admonition of the consistory shall be suspended from the privileges of membership. The privileges of confessing membership include but are not limited to presentation of children for holy baptism, the right to vote at congregational meetings, and eligibility to hold office.

c. A person may be excluded from membership only after the consistory has secured the approval of the classis.

d. The role of the classis in giving approval is

1) To judge whether proper procedure has been followed.
2) To assure that adequate pastoral care has been extended to the person.
3) To determine that the consistory has advanced adequate reasons for proceeding with discipline.

e. The approval of classis does not obligate a consistory to exclude a person from membership since repentance and restoration to the full fellowship of the church are always possible.

f. The liturgical forms and announcements for admonition and discipline may be used if the consistory judges that these will further the purposes of discipline and will serve the welfare of the congregation.

(*Acts of Synod 1991*, p. 718)
(*Acts of Synod 2011*, pp. 829-30)

C. The Admonition and Discipline of Officebearers

Article 82

All officebearers, in addition to being subject to general discipline, are subject to special discipline, which consists of suspension and deposition from office.

Article 83

Special discipline shall be applied to officebearers if they violate the Covenant for Officebearers, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 83

Article 84

Persons who have been suspended or deposed from office may be reinstated if they give sufficient evidence of repentance and if the church judges that they are able to serve effectively. Requests for reinstatement to office by those deposed for acts of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct shall be dealt with according to guidelines adopted by synod.

—Cf. Supplement, Articles 78-84
—Cf. Supplement, Articles 82-84
—Cf. Supplement, Article 84

Supplement, Articles 78-84

Guidelines for Confidentiality

Synod affirmed the necessity for strict confidentiality on the part of councils and consistories in all matters relating to admonition and discipline by recommending the following guidelines to the churches:

a. Every church should state its membership commitments very clearly, including the expectation that all members are to participate in and be subject to the admonition and discipline of the church.

b. Officebearers should scrupulously observe confidentiality with respect to persons who come under their counsel and discipline.

c. Careful and confidential records should be kept whenever a discipline case reaches the level of action by the elders and/or announcements are made to the congregation.

d. Special care should be observed in the wording of public announcements. The sin of the person should not be mentioned, but only that he/she is unrepentant.

e. Established policies with respect to procedures and public announcements should be consistently followed by the elders of the church.

(*Acts of Synod 1991*, pp. 723, 769)

Supplement, Articles 82-84

The Admonition and Discipline of Officebearers

a. An administrative leave may be imposed without prejudice by the council in order to investigate allegations of deviation from

sound doctrine or godly conduct. Compensation and benefits would continue, and any duties to be performed during the leave would be specified by the council. All suspensions and administrative leaves are temporary.

b. Officebearers who confess to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct will be considered guilty of serious deviation from godly conduct and worthy of discipline.

c. General discipline shall not be applied to an officebearer unless he/she has first been suspended from office.

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

e. Suspension/deposition of elders, deacons, and commissioned pastors

   1) The suspension or deposition of an elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor shall be imposed by the council with the concurring judgment of the council of the nearest church in the same classis.

   2) If the neighboring council fails to concur in the position of the council of the elder, deacon, or commissioned pastor involved, the latter council shall either alter its original judgment or present the case to classis.

f. Suspension/deposition of ministers

   1) The suspension of a minister of the Word shall be imposed by the council of the minister's church with the concurring judgment of the council of the nearest church in the same classis.

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

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

g. Ministers subject to two councils

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

   2) If the councils disagree, the case shall be submitted to the classis of the calling church for disposition.

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

i. The council of the church which deposed the minister shall declare the deposed minister eligible to receive a call upon the affirmative judgment of the classis which approved the deposition, together with the concurrence of the synodical deputies. Upon acceptance of a call, the previously deposed minister shall be reordained.

j. When a minister resigns under discipline or to avoid discipline, he or she should be released from office per Article 14-c, noting that the provisions of Supplement, Article 14-b also apply to Article 14-c, especially in these situations.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 14-c
(*Acts of Synod 1991,* pp. 719-20)
(*Acts of Synod 2016,* pp. 863-64)

Note: Councils and classes should take note of the regulations regarding suspension and/or deposition from ministerial office adopted by Synod 1998 (see *Acts of Synod 1998*, pp. 396-99).

Supplement, Article 83

One of the key dynamics in considering abuse of office is the imbalance and misuse of power. The power inherent in the role of officebearer represents a sacred trust and must not be misused.

(*Acts of Synod 2016*, p. 865)

Supplement, Article 84

Regulations for Reinstatement of Officebearers Guilty of Sexual Misconduct

When reinstatement is requested by a former officebearer who confessed to or was determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct leading up to suspension and deposition from office:

1. Reinstatement to office shall be denied to individuals who:
   a. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct against a minor.
   b. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct against more than one victim in a single church or community.
   c. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct in more than one community or church.
   d. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct and other related ungodly conduct.

      Examples of related ungodly conduct include, but are not limited to, participation in pornography, engaging in sexual contact in return for payment or any other favor, or voyeuristic behavior, displays of sexually offensive material, suggestive gestures and remarks, and other sexually intimidating behavior.

2. Councils and classes shall not reinstate a former officebearer suspended or deposed for sexual misconduct or ungodly conduct not covered in items 1, a-d without receiving the advice of legal counsel concerning the church's liability and the advice of a Christian licensed psychologist concerning the likelihood of an officebearer's reoffending.

Note 1: The "Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations Against a Church Leader" adopted by Synod 2010 (cf. *Agenda for Synod 2010,* pp. 503-504) define sexual misconduct as

- exploiting or grooming (preparing) a minor or an adult—regardless of consent or circumstances—for the purpose of sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy, with the result of either sexual gratification or power and control over the minor or adult;
- unwelcome touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between co-workers, co-volunteers; or
- sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between a supervisor and a subordinate who serve together in a church program or church ministry.

Note 2: These rules that prevent the reinstatement of deposed officebearers in particular situations also apply to those ministers who have been released by way of Article 14 and have been declared "dismissed" or "in the status of one deposed" due to those situations.

(*Acts of Synod 2004*, pp 611-12)
(*Acts of Synod 2016*, pp. 865-66)

CONCLUSION

Article 85

No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no officebearer shall lord it over another officebearer.

Article 86

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