



Church Order

Of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

As approved at Synod 2012 (*Article 37.6*)

And updated at Synod 2018 (*Article 20*)

Church Order Of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

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Preamble

Condensed Preamble

As churches together we agree that the following, while not forming part of the Church Order proper, is a summary of fundamental guiding principles related to the Church Order. (The full version of this Preamble – as originally approved by Synod 1997 and amended by subsequent synods – can be found in the Decision Book.)

1. Theological Considerations

Even as the Word of God identifies Christ as the Head, the Shepherd, the Bridegroom and the King of the Church, so the norms for the government of his Church are given in the Scriptures. Here we are given the over-arching guiding principle that *everything must be done decently and in order* (1 Cor 14:40). This principle, declared in the context of regulating the worship service, clearly has a far wider application than to worship alone. Our God is an orderly God, and his people are to mirror him in this respect also. Thus there are constant reminders that the Christian must live in an orderly manner, worthy of his calling to represent God before the world. This is as true in the context of the Christian fellowship (Eph 4:1) as it is in all walks of life (Phil 1:27; Col 1:10; Col 2:5; 1 Thess 2:12).

The Bible gives both specific and general guidelines to aid Christians in living decent and orderly lives within the Christian fellowship. Christ himself gives rules for dealing with interpersonal conflicts (Mt 18:15 ff) and his apostles give regulations on such diverse issues as the eating of meat offered to idols (Acts 15:29), dress code and grooming (1 Cor 11), and the selection of church officers (1 Tim 3).

In view of the biblical data we recognise that in apostolic times there were three types of regulations:
Permanent principles and regulations governing the church for all times;
Regulations that covered the church in a specific temporal and cultural context;
Regulations that applied only to regional or specific local churches.

What is the import of all this for our Church Order?

- 1.1. In its Church Order the church must seek to reflect all principles and regulations that Scripture presents as binding for the church of all ages.
- 1.2. In its Church Order the church must also regulate such practices as are not prescribed in the Scriptures but which are required for the smooth running of the churches as a denomination. By and large these are regulated according to the practices and norms of society and “the light of nature” (Westminster Confession of Faith, Art 1:vi). Such regulations need take into account the legal requirements of society, and may have legal standing as the bylaws by which the church institution is regulated. While such regulations may be altered by the changing of times and customs, as long as they remain in force they are uniform and mandatory for the sake of denominational unity.
- 1.3. There are other situations that require regulation, but which do not call for a denominational uniformity and therefore are not included in the Church Order. These are often best regulated by regional or local church councils. Included here are matters of faith and worship which have no specific Scriptural guidelines and which must be regulated in a way which does the maximum justice to the liberty of conscience enjoyed by all God’s children.

2. The Purpose of the Church Order

- 2.1. The Church Order seeks to regulate all Scriptural requirements for the organisation and management of Christ's Church, and;
- 2.2. The Church Order seeks to regulate all matters which require a common, uniform approach for the well-being of Christ's Church as represented by the denomination.

3. The Nature of the Church Order

- 3.1. The Church Order is *regulative*. By means of the Church Order the denomination not only guides but regulates its ecclesiastical organisation and activities and by virtue of common agreement it is binding upon the churches and its members. Office bearers are committed to uphold and follow the Church Order.
- 3.2. While the Church Order is regulative, *it does not require an unreasoned legalistic obedience*. If a session, for reasons of impracticality, or for the peace and harmony of the congregation, desires in a particular circumstance to override an article of the Church Order, it shall apply to the classis for permission. When time constraints prevent classis' consideration, the session shall apply to the moderamen of classis for approval. The moderamen shall report their decision to the next classis assembly.
- 3.3. The Church Order is *not exhaustive in its scope*. While it seeks to regulate where guidance is needed, it is not a document to cover all possible contingencies.
- 3.4. The Church Order is *not a fixed document*. It may and should be altered as times and circumstances dictate.
- 3.5. Many details of the Church Order are *not determined directly by the Word of God* even though we maintain that its fundamental principles are directly derived from Scripture.
- 3.6. The Church Order *does not have the status of a creed*. By this is meant that it can be changed without gravamen and it is not to be considered, in all its parts, as a summary of Scripture's direct teaching.
- 3.7. The Church Order is *not an aims / purpose / strategy document*. Since these tend to reflect local conditions and situations, and conceivably change from time to time, it is more appropriate that these be dealt with by the local session, in conjunction with the congregation.
- 3.8. The Church Order should *be differentiated from synodical guidelines* which seek to give guidance in more specific areas of church life and practice.
- 3.9. The Church Order is not a doctrinal document and need not include material already dealt with in the Confessions.

Church Order

Of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia

As approved at Synod 2012 (*Article 37.6*)

Article 1 – The Purpose, Basis and Subjects of the Church Order

- a. The Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, confessing their 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 conduct the affairs of the churches in a fitting and orderly way (*1 Cor 14:40*), regulate their ecclesiastical organisation and activities in the articles which follow.
- b. Within Reformed Church polity it has been the understanding that the Church Order is neither to be seen as a rigid system of rules, nor as a set of mere guidelines. (*Refer Condensed Preamble 3.1 and 3.2*)
- c. Tensions may arise between the rights of the local congregations and the authority of the broader assemblies. For that reason the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia are committed to the position that
 - i. the Church Order is adopted by common consent and is therefore to be faithfully observed. No local church should take it upon itself to make revisions to the Church Order; rather, this is the task of all the churches together.
 - ii. the Church Order ought to be flexible enough to maintain the autonomy of the local church while at the same time holding to a common commitment in our denominational relationships.
- d. The main subjects treated in this Church Order are:
 - Part I: the Offices of the Church,
 - Part II: the Assemblies of the Church,
 - Part III: the Task and Activities of the Church,
 - Part IV: the Admonition and Discipline of the Church.

PART I

THE OFFICES OF THE CHURCH

Section A – General Provisions

Article 2 – General and Special Offices in the Church

While recognising the general office and giftedness of all God's people, the church identifies the special offices of minister of the Word and Sacraments, elder and deacon. These offices differ from each other in mandate and task.

Article 3 – Eligibility for Special Offices

Communicant members of a congregation who meet the biblical requirements for an office bearer are eligible for office. The offices of minister of the Word and Sacraments and elder are restricted to men. The office of deacon is open to both men and women.

Article 3 – Eligibility for Special Offices

- a. Communicant members of a congregation who meet the biblical requirements for an office bearer are eligible for office. The offices of minister of the Word and Sacraments and elder are restricted to men. The office of deacon is open to both men and women.
- b. No one shall hold or exercise an office in the church without being lawfully called and ordained or installed.

Article 4 – Calling to Special Offices

- a. In calling and electing to an office, the session shall ordinarily¹ present to the congregation a nomination of at least twice the number to be elected. When a nomination which totals less than twice the number is submitted, the session shall give reasons for doing so.
- b. The session will give the congregation adequate opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons and to submit lawful objections concerning the nominees.
- c. The election, in which only confessing members in good standing have the right to vote, shall, after prayer, take place according to the regulations of the local church.
- d. After having announced on two successive Sundays the names of those who have been elected and appointed, and provided there are no lawful objections, the ordination or installation shall take place in a public worship service, with the use of appropriate sections of the relevant liturgical forms.

Article 5 – Signifying Agreement with the Form of Subscription

All office bearers, licensed preachers and candidates for the ministry shall signify their agreement with the doctrines of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia by signing the Form of Subscription, and in other appropriate ways, as stipulated by the regulations of the session, classis, and synod.

Section B – Ministers of the Word and Sacraments

Article 6 – Students for the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments

The churches shall encourage suitably gifted men to seek the ministry of the Word and Sacraments and shall, where necessary, provide financial support.

Article 7 – Eligibility for Admission to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments

No one shall be called by the church to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments without having completed:

- a. a theological training at the Reformed Theological College, including a vicariate as prescribed by synod and approved by the Vicariate Committee; or,
- b. a theological training deemed to be the equivalent of that offered by the Reformed Theological College, including a vicariate as prescribed by synod. In such cases, the classis of the candidate's church is responsible for recommending the candidate and shall follow the procedures as approved by Synod.

Such person shall submit to a preliminary examination by a classis in accordance with synodical regulations. If the classis is satisfied with the examination, it shall declare the candidate eligible for call to the ministry.

¹ As used throughout the Church Order it implies that only in particular or exceptional circumstances can exceptions be made.

Article 8 – Admission to the Ministry Without Prescribed Training

- a. In exceptional cases a man who gives clear evidence of such gifts as godliness, humility, spiritual discretion, wisdom and gifts of public address, may be recommended by his session as eligible for call to the ministry.
- b. The classis, in the presence of the synodical deputies, shall examine these men concerning the required gifts. With the agreement of the synodical deputies the classis may resolve to proceed with the ordination in accordance with synodical regulations. *(See Art 51)*

Article 9 – Ministers Eligible for Call

- a. A minister in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, or in a denomination recognised by synod as a Church in Ecclesiastical Fellowship, is eligible for call subject to regulations prescribed by synod. *(See Art 52.b)*
- b. A minister in a denomination not recognised as a Church in Ecclesiastical Fellowship who wishes to enter the ministry in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia must submit to an examination that is the same in form as a Preliminary Examination. A Classis shall make a thorough examination of his theological training, ministerial record, knowledge of and soundness in the Reformed faith, exemplariness of life, motives for seeking the ministry in the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, and his cultural awareness of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Upon sustaining the Examination, he shall be declared either eligible for ordination or eligible for call at the discretion of the Classis. The presence and concurring advice of the synodical deputies are required if the man is to be declared eligible for ordination. If the candidate is declared eligible for ordination, then he will not need to submit to a Final Examination before ordination. If he is declared only eligible for call, then he will need to submit to a Final Examination before ordination. *(See Art 51)*
- c. The status of a minister who is not presently serving a congregation, and who is not a minister in special or general service, is that of a minister without charge. After a period of not more than three years, his status will be reviewed by the classis and the church where he has his membership.

Article 10 – Admission, Ordination and Installation

- a. A candidate for admission to the ministry who has been declared eligible for call, and who has received a call, shall submit to a final examination regarding doctrine and life in accordance with synodical regulations. This examination shall be conducted by the classis of the church issuing the call. If the preliminary and final examinations are conducted by the same classis, a synodical deputy from another classis must attend the final examination. With the agreement of the synodical deputy the classis may resolve to proceed with ordination.
- b. The ordination of a candidate for the ministry shall be accompanied by the laying on of hands by the officiating minister. Other ministers of the denomination and elders of the local church may be invited to participate in the laying on of hands.
- c. A minister, already ordained, shall not be installed until the classis of the church issuing the call or the Classis Contracta, as defined by Article 44.b, has received all the ecclesiastical documents required by regulations of the synod and has approved the installation.

Article 11 – Function of the Minister of the Word and Sacraments

The calling of a minister of the Word and Sacraments is to proclaim, explain and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and build up the members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Article 12 – Ministers in Regular Service

A minister serving as pastor of a congregation shall:

- a. preach the Word;
- b. lead the congregation in prayer;
- c. administer the sacraments;
- d. solemnise marriages;
- e. perform other pastoral duties as defined by the session;
- f. share in all the tasks performed by session. *(See Arts 23, 31)*

Article 13 – Ministers in Special and General Service

Ministers in general and special service, i.e., those called to an extraordinary task outside of or within the denomination, shall be under the supervision of a local or calling church as to their doctrine and life. The duties of such ministers shall be regulated by the appropriate committee or board.

Article 14 – Associate Ministers

A minister without charge, or a minister in general or special service, may be appointed by the session of the church of which he is a member as its 'associate minister'. The supervision of his doctrine and life shall be by that session. *(See Art 13)*

Article 15 – Release from Ministerial Office

A minister who has been lawfully called shall not relinquish his office, except that the session may, for valid reasons, release him from office, provided that the classis and the synodical deputies agree. *(See Art 51)*

Article 16 – Worship Services in non-CRCA Churches

A minister who plans to conduct regular worship services in the vicinity of one of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia shall first inform the session of that church. *(See Art 52.a)*

Article 17 – Temporary Release from Service

- a. A minister who, for valid reasons, desires a temporary leave of absence from service to a congregation must have the approval of his session, which shall continue to have supervision over him.
- b. The session shall ensure that, if necessary, satisfactory arrangements for supporting him and his dependants be made for such a period.

Article 18 – Release from the Ministry in a Congregation

- a. A minister may be released from active ministerial service and declared a minister without charge by way of mutual agreement with his session, but only on weighty non-disciplinary grounds. The concurrence of the classis and at least two synodical deputies must be given. *(See Art 51)* This agreement shall effectively terminate his call with the congregation concerned. Such a minister shall remain under the supervision of the church of which he is a member.

- b. Where the relationship between a minister and his congregation or session has deteriorated to such an extent that he can no longer fruitfully serve his congregation but where there is no cause for discipline, the minister may be released by his session from active ministerial service provided that the classis and at least two synodical deputies agree, in accordance with synodical regulations. *(See Art 51)*
- c. The session of a minister who is released shall provide support for him and his dependants in accordance with synodical regulations. If a minister released in this way does not receive a call within a reasonable time, he may, at the discretion of the classis and with the approval of the synodical deputies, be released from the office of minister. *(See Art 51)*

Article 19 – Discharge from the Ministry

- a. A minister whose session finds that he clearly lacks the essential qualifications for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, while he is neither eligible for retirement nor liable to discipline, may be discharged by his session from the office of minister, provided that the classis and at least two synodical deputies agree. Such a decision shall be final unless an appeal by the minister is sustained by synod. *(See Art 51)*
- b. The session which discharged the minister shall provide support for him and his dependants in accordance with synodical regulations.

Article 20 – Resignation from the Ministry

A minister who resigns from the ordained ministry shall not be released until this has been accepted by session and classis, with the concurrence of the synodical deputies. *(See Art 51)*

Article 21 – Retirement of Ministers

- a. A minister who, because of age or some physical or mental disability, is eligible for retirement may, with the approval of session and classis, retire in accordance with synodical regulations and the laws of the land.
- b. A retired minister shall retain the honour and title of a minister of the Word and Sacraments. The church of which he is a member is responsible for his credentials and supervision, and shall take care that he and his dependants are adequately provided for in accordance with synodical regulations and the laws of the land.
- c. Should the reasons for his retirement no longer exist, the minister emeritus shall request his session and the classis which recommended him for retirement to declare him eligible for call.

Article 22 – Election of Elders and Deacons

- a. Elders and deacons shall serve for a time determined by the session, as a rule not exceeding four years.
- b. Retiring elders or deacons shall be succeeded by others unless the session, in consultation with the congregation, considers that circumstances and the welfare of the church make it advisable that they continue in office.
- c. Elders and deacons previously ordained to that office shall be installed upon re-election.

Article 23 – Tasks of the Elders

With the minister(s) of the church, the elders shall:

- a. be examples to the congregation in all things;
- b. oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow office bearers;
- c. faithfully provide pastoral care for the congregation; *(See Arts 66.b, c)*
- d. supervise all aspects of the worship services;
- e. supervise the catechising of the youth; *(See Art 65.b)*
- f. equip and encourage God's people in evangelism and other works of service; *(See Art 74)*
- g. administer the sacraments (but only) in special circumstances;
- h. guard the sacredness of the offices;
- i. see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 24 – Tasks of the Deacons

The deacons shall:

- a. exercise the ministry of Christian mercy to those who are in material or social need, especially those who belong to the community of believers, both at home and abroad; in carrying out this task they shall minister by means of prayer, counsel and assistance;
- b. stimulate the congregation to faithful, obedient stewardship of their resources on behalf of the needy; and encourage and instruct them in works of Christian mercy;
- c. confer and cooperate with diaconates of neighbouring churches, as well as other agencies caring for the needy, so that gifts may be properly distributed.

PART II
THE ASSEMBLIES OF THE CHURCH

Section A – General Provisions

Article 25 – Assemblies

The assemblies of the church are:

- a. the session or church council,
- b. the classis,
- c. the synod.

Article 26 – Authority of Church Assemblies

- a. Each assembly, in keeping with its own character and domain, exercises the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ: the authority of sessions being original, that of classes and synods being delegated.
- b. In matters that are properly the concern of a major assembly, such a major assembly has authority over a minor assembly – the classis has authority over the session, and the synod has authority over the classis.

Article 27 – Matters Legally Before Assemblies

- a. An assembly shall deal only with ecclesiastical matters 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 brought to a conclusion in the minor assemblies.
- c. Matters referred by minor assemblies to major assemblies shall be presented in accordance with the rules for classical and synodical procedure.

Article 28 – Decisions of Assemblies and Reconsideration of Such

- a. Decisions of assemblies shall be reached only after due consideration and, whenever possible, by common consent. Where unanimity cannot be reached, the minority shall abide by the judgment of the majority. The decisions of assemblies shall be considered settled and binding.
- b. A request for revision of a decision shall be submitted to the assembly which made the decision. Such a request shall be considered only if new and sufficient grounds are presented.

Article 29 – Appeals

- a. Assemblies and church members may appeal to the assembly next in order if they believe that a decision is in conflict with Scripture, the Confessions, or the Church Order. Appeals may also be lodged if a decision is believed to be detrimental to the well-being of the church, or if possible injustice has been done.
- b. Synodical guidelines for lodging and processing appeals shall apply.

Article 30 – Procedure and Order in Assemblies

- a. All assemblies shall begin and end in prayer.
- b. In each assembly there shall be a chairman whose duty it is to state and explain the business to be transacted; to see to it that the Church Order is adhered to; and to ensure that everyone observes due order and decorum in speaking. There shall also be a clerk whose task it is to keep an accurate record of the proceedings.
- c. Each assembly shall make proper provision for receiving communications, preparing agendas and keeping minutes, files and archives, and conducting the financial transactions of the assembly.

Section B – The Session / Church Council

Article 31 – Composition of a Session

- a. In every church there shall be a session which is responsible for the spiritual well-being of the church members and for the general government of the church.
- b. The session shall consist of three or more members and, according to local regulations, is composed of the minister(s), elders and deacon(s) or, alternatively, of the minister(s) and elders.
- c. Where deacons are included as part of the session, only men can serve as deacons. In larger sessions a distinction may be made between the general session, in which all office bearers participate, and the restricted session in which deacons do not participate. When such a distinction is made, the supervision and discipline of the congregation shall be vested in the restricted session.

All other matters belong to the general session, and the deacons shall be accountable to the general session for their work of Christian mercy.

- d. Where deacons are not included as part of the session, both men and women can serve as deacons. The diaconate shall undertake the tasks which belong distinctively to the office of deacon and shall be accountable to the session for this work.
- e. Sessions shall see to it that elders and deacons are adequately prepared for office.

Article 32 – Support of Ministers and Church Workers

The session, representing the church, shall provide support for its minister(s) and other employees in accordance with the agreed contract, synodical regulations, and the laws of the land. The session shall take care that those who are prevented from carrying out their duties due to illness or other legitimate causes shall be adequately provided for.

Article 33 – Frequency of Meetings and Mutual Censure

- a. The session shall ordinarily² meet at least once a month, at a time and place announced to the congregation. The minister, or one of the elders, shall act as chairman.
- b. At session meetings, at least four times per year, the office bearers shall exercise mutual censure, which concerns an evaluation of their life and duties as office bearers.

Article 34 – Need for Counsellor During Vacancy

The session of a church which is without a minister shall request its classis to appoint a minister as counsellor. The session shall consult the counsellor about all important matters, especially the call of a minister. If a call is issued, the session members shall sign the letter of call. The counsellor shall also sign to indicate that proper procedures were followed. The counsellor shall attend session meetings whenever requested, and shall report to the classis on his work if classis requests it.

Article 35 – Achieving Congregational Status

- a. Groups of believers among whom no session can as yet be instituted shall be under the care and supervision of a neighbouring session designated by classis.
- b. A session shall not be instituted without the approval of the classis.

Article 36 – Cooperation of the Congregation and Congregational Meetings

- a. The session shall seek the cooperation of the congregation in the election of office bearers and shall seek its advice on other matters, except those which pertain to the supervision and discipline of the congregation. For this purpose the session shall convene a meeting of the congregation at least once a year. The session shall conduct this meeting and determine its agenda.
- b. On matters where a vote is required, only communicant members are entitled to vote.
- c. Although full consideration shall be given to the advice of the congregation, the authority for making and carrying out final decisions remains with the session as the governing body of the church.

² As used throughout the Church Order it implies that only in particular or exceptional circumstances can exceptions be made.

Article 37 – Disaffiliation or Disbandment

- a. A decision by the session regarding the denominational affiliation of the local church must be endorsed by a two-thirds majority of an officially constituted congregational meeting, where the church visitors are in attendance. *(See Art 45)*
- b. In the case of disaffiliation, unless there are other regulations which take precedence, all assets, debts and liabilities will be divided proportionately according to the numbers leaving and staying.
- c. In the case of a church being disbanded, unless there are other regulations which take precedence, all assets, debts and liabilities will be distributed in consultation with, and the approval of, classis.

Section C – The Major Assemblies: Classis and Synod

General Provisions

Article 38 – Definition, Credentials and Voting

- a. The major assemblies are composed of office bearers who are delegated by their constituent minor assemblies. The minor assemblies shall provide their delegates with proper credentials which authorise them to deliberate and vote on matters brought before the major assemblies.
- b. Meetings of all assemblies are public, unless they are declared restricted to office bearers only.
- c. Prior to voting, an assembly may decide to withhold voting rights of delegates who are considered to have a conflict of interest, e.g., when there is a pecuniary interest, a close family member is involved, or where the integrity of an individual or the assembly he represents is under investigation.

Article 39 – Delegation of Deacons

If a major assembly has to deal specifically with matters pertaining to the work of mercy, the minor assemblies shall delegate a deacon in addition to the ordinary number of delegates. *(See Art 24)*

Article 40 – Appointment of Convening Church

A major assembly is convened by the church designated by the last meeting of that assembly. This church shall be responsible for preparing for the meeting.

Article 41 – Composition of Moderamen and Interim Committee

- a. A major assembly shall appoint a moderamen consisting of the chairman and clerk, and one or more of its other members as officers.
- b. The moderamen of each assembly shall normally function as an interim committee, to act for the assembly in matters which cannot await action by the assemblies themselves. Such committees shall be given well-defined mandates and shall submit a report on all their actions to the next meeting of the assembly for approval.

The Classis

Article 42 – Constituency of a Classis

- a. A classis shall consist of three or more neighbouring churches. The organising of a new classis and a change in the district covered by a classis require the approval of the synod.
- b. When the number of churches in a classis becomes less than three the classis shall be disbanded. These churches shall:
 - i. join the nearest classis or, if distance makes this impractical, be considered as churches in an area where no classis exists and, in such cases, they shall act on issues normally involving classis participation in consultation with, and accountable to, the nearest classis;
 - ii. settle the financial affairs of the classis where necessary.

Article 43 – Meetings of Classis

- a. The session of each church shall delegate a minister and an elder to the classis. If the church is without a minister, or the minister is prevented from attending, two elders shall be delegated. Other office bearers who attend classis may be given an advisory voice.
- b. A smaller classis may set the number of voting delegates at three from each session in order to facilitate the business of the classis meeting.
- c. Classis meetings shall ordinarily³ be held at least once in four months at the time and place determined by the previous meeting of classis.
- d. A chairman and vice-chairman shall be elected from among the delegates, and may preside for a term of up to twelve months. In exceptional circumstances the Chairman or Vice-chairman may be elected for an additional twelve month period, but neither Chairman nor Vice-Chairman shall serve more than two consecutive twelve month periods.

Article 44 – The Work of Classis

- a. A classis shall
 - i. deal with all matters properly presented to it;
 - ii. carefully watch that the churches discharge their calling and task faithfully and in accordance with the Church Order;
 - iii. give advice and assistance to the churches in its district, particularly to those which are without a minister or are in financial need.
- b. For the period between its ordinary meetings, a classis may appoint the sessions of two or more churches to issue ministerial testimonies of leave and to approve calls of ministers. These sessions shall constitute a Classis Contracta, which shall: *(See Art 10.c)*
 - i. notify the other churches of classis of its meetings;
 - ii. not pass any resolutions to which lawful objections have been raised;
 - iii. report its actions to the next meeting of classis.

Article 45 – Church Visitors

- a. A classis shall appoint two or more office bearers (at least one of whom shall be a minister) as church visitors. At the discretion of the classis, a senior former elder may be appointed as one of the church visitors.

³ As used throughout the Church Order it implies that only in particular or exceptional circumstances can exceptions be made.

Church Order

- b. The church visitors shall visit all the churches in accordance with synodical regulations. Where this is not feasible, they shall arrange for other experienced ministers and elders to deputise for them. In the case of difficulties, the official church visitors shall be the ones to assist the church (es) concerned.
- c. The church visitors shall, as a rule, use the questionnaire and regulations drawn up by synod, and ascertain whether the office bearers faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, properly promote the edification of the congregation and evangelism, and are involved in general Christian activities in accordance with the provisions of the Church Order and the decisions of the major assemblies. Where necessary, they shall in brotherly love admonish those who have been negligent and help with all advice and assistance.
- d. Sessions or congregational members may call upon the church visitors whenever serious problems arise. Congregational members must first have raised the matter with their session.
- e. The church visitors shall give a written report of their work to classis.

Article 46 – Classis Licensures

A classis may grant a preaching license within its bounds to men who are gifted, well-informed, dedicated and able to edify the churches. When the desirability of their services has been established, the classis shall examine such men and license them in accordance with synodical regulations.

Article 47 – Joint Action of Neighbouring Classes

A classis may take counsel or joint action with its neighbouring classis or classes in matters of mutual concern. Cases of joint action shall be reported to the next synod.

The Synod

Article 48 – Constituency

- a. The synod is the assembly representing all the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders to the synod. If there are not enough ministers to meet the required number of minister delegates, an elder shall be delegated in place of a minister.
- b. The churches of an area in which no classis exists shall send one delegate between them, who may be a minister or elder.
- c. Professors of the Reformed Theological College who are members of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia or a Church in Ecclesiastical Fellowship shall be invited to attend the synodical sessions as advisory members.
- d. Other advisers may be appointed by request of the synod.

Article 49 – Meetings

- a. The synod shall meet at least once every three years, at a time and place determined by the previous synod. (*See Art 40*)
- b. The convening church shall call a special synod if so requested by three or more classes.
- c. The chairman of the Synod shall be a minister, but the same minister may not preside at two successive meetings of the Synod. Otherwise, the election and duties of officers of the Synod shall be in accordance with rules prescribed by the Synod.

Article 50 – Task

The synod shall deal with matters which could not be brought to a conclusion in its minor assemblies, as well as matters which concern the churches in common, such as the principles and elements of the order of worship, the designation of the Bible versions to be used in worship services, and the adoption and revision of the Confessions, the Church Order, the Liturgical Forms and the Book of Worship.

When voting on matters of Confession and Church Order, a majority of two-thirds or more of the synod is required for approval. The synod shall not make any alterations in these matters unless the minor assemblies have had prior opportunity to consider the proposed changes.

Article 51 – Synodical Deputies

- a. The synod shall appoint deputies nominated by the classes, two from each classis, at least one of whom shall be a minister. A third, also a minister, shall act as alternate. The deputies shall serve for a term designated by the synod.
- b. When the cooperation of the synodical deputies is required by the Church Order, the presence of at least two deputies from another classis or classes is prescribed, except in the case of Article 10.a.
- c. Besides the duties elsewhere stipulated, the deputies shall, upon request, extend help to the classes or churches in the event of difficulties in order that unity, order and sound doctrine may be maintained. *(See Arts 7, 8, 9, 15, 18, 19, 20, 83, 84)*
- d. Reports on the activities and findings of these deputies shall be given to the classis and to the subsequent synod. The classis or the deputies concerned shall be free to place such matters on synod's agenda for action.

Article 52 – Inter-Church Relations

- a. The synod shall appoint a committee to correspond with other Reformed Churches at home and abroad so that the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia may exercise Christian fellowship with other denominations and may promote the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. *(See Arts 9, 16, 62.b, 68)*
- b. The synod shall decide which denominations are to be received into ecclesiastical fellowship and shall prescribe the regulations which govern these relationships.

Article 53 – Reformed Ecumenical Assemblies

- a. The synod shall, if possible, send delegates to Reformed ecumenical assemblies in which the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia cooperate with other denominations that confess and maintain the Reformed faith.
- b. The synod may present to such ecumenical assemblies matters on which it seeks the advice and/or participation of other Reformed Churches.
- c. Decisions of Reformed ecumenical assemblies shall be binding upon the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia only when they have been ratified by its synod.

Article 54 – Relationship with the Reformed Theological College

The synod shall appoint deputies for maintaining the relationship with the Reformed Theological College, Geelong, in accordance with the mutual rights and obligations stipulated in the agreement between the synod and the Board of Directors of the Association for Christian Tertiary Education.

Article 55 – Correspondence with Civil Authorities

The synod shall appoint deputies for contact with civil authorities.

PART III THE TASK OF THE CHURCH

Section A – Worship Services

Article 56 – Occasions for Worship Services

- a. The sessions shall see to it that the congregations assemble for public worship at least once a Sunday.
- b. Additional worship services on Christmas Day, Good Friday, Ascension Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, as well as annual services of prayer and thanksgiving are left to the discretion of each church.
- c. Special worship services proclaimed by the synod or its interim committee in times of great stress or blessing for church, nation or world shall be arranged by sessions.

Article 57 – Worship Services

- a. The session shall regulate the worship services. *(See Arts 31, 59)*
- b. The session shall see to it that ordinarily⁴ the Bible versions, the liturgical forms and the Book of Worship approved by synod are used, and that the principles and elements of the order of worship approved by synod as a sufficient guideline, are observed.
- c. Other biblically sound hymns and Scripture passages set to music may be used at the discretion of the session.
- d. If liturgical forms for the sacraments are adapted, synodical guidelines are to be followed.

Article 58 – Conducting Services and the Preached Word

- a. The minister, or others appointed by session, shall conduct the worship services. *(See Art 31)*
- b. When the session appoints persons other than the minister or those licensed to preach to present the sermon, such a sermon must be approved in accordance with synodical regulations.
- c. When sermons other than those of ministers of the denomination and other synodically approved denominations are used for reading services, this will need the prior agreement of the session.

⁴ As used throughout the Church Order it implies that only in particular or exceptional circumstances can exceptions be made.

Article 59 – Preaching

- a. In the worship services the minister or the person appointed by the session shall explain and apply the Scriptures. *(See Art 57)*
- b. So as not to neglect the teaching of the confessional standards, the minister or preacher appointed by the session shall regularly preach the Word of God as summarised in the Three Forms of Unity. Other Reformed symbols may be used with the approval of the session.

Article 60 – Administration of the Sacraments

- a. Ordinarily⁵ the minister shall administer the sacraments.
- b. In special circumstances, a person licensed to preach, or an elder appointed by the session to lead in worship and read a sermon, may administer the sacraments.
- c. The sacraments shall be administered in public worship services using the prescribed forms or adaptations that conform to synodical guidelines.
- d. In special circumstances the sacraments may be administered to those who cannot attend the regular services.

Article 61 – Baptism

- a. The covenant of God shall be sealed by baptism to children of believers and to children legally adopted by members of the congregation. The session shall encourage parents to present their children for baptism as soon as feasible.
- b. Adults who have not been baptised shall receive baptism on professing their faith in a public worship service.
- c. The baptism of a person who joins the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia from another Christian church is considered valid if it has been administered in the Name of the Triune God, by a person authorised by that denomination.

Article 62 – Admission to Communicant Membership

- a. The session shall examine baptised members who wish to become communicant members concerning their motives, doctrine and life. Subject to satisfactory assessment, baptised members shall become communicant members on professing their faith in a public worship service in accordance with the form for the public profession of faith prescribed by the synod.
- b. Communicant members coming from another congregation of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia or from churches recognised as churches in ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to communicant membership upon the presentation of certificates of membership attesting their soundness in doctrine and life. *(See Arts 52, 68.a)*
- c. Persons coming from denominations other than those recognised as churches in ecclesiastical fellowship shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the session has satisfied itself concerning their motives, doctrine and life. The session shall determine in each case whether or not public profession of faith is required.

⁵ As used throughout the Church Order it implies that only in particular or exceptional circumstances can exceptions be made.

- d. The names of those who are to become communicant members shall be announced to the congregation for approval at least one Sunday before the public profession of faith.

Article 63 – Lord’s Supper

- a. The Lord’s Supper shall be administered at least once every three months.
- b. The session shall provide for the Lord’s Supper to be administered in a way which it judges to conform to the Word of God and to be conducive to edification.

Article 64 – Offerings

- a. In the public worship services gifts of gratitude shall be received.
- b. Offerings shall be taken at regular intervals for the needy and other purposes determined by the local church, classis or synod.

Section B – Faith Nurture

Article 65 – Faith Nurture

- a. Each church shall minister to its children and youth, and others who so desire, by nurturing in them a personal faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. This 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 its youth, and others who so desire, in the Scriptures and in the Creeds and Confessions of the church, in order to prepare them to profess their faith publicly and to equip them to assume their Christian responsibilities in the church and the world. This instruction shall be supervised by the session. *(See Arts 12, 23.e, 31)*
- c. Each church shall provide opportunities for continued instruction for its adult members, so that they might grow in their knowledge and love of Christ and become more mature in their faith. This instruction shall be supervised by the session. *(See Art 31)*

Section C – Pastoral Care and Oversight

Article 66 – In and Outside the Congregation

- a. The session shall ensure that pastoral care is extended to all members and regular attenders, with particular attention given to the sick, the distressed, the aged and the erring, and it shall encourage the members of the congregation to be faithfully involved in mutual care.
- b. As shepherds of the flock, the minister and the elders shall visit all members and regular attenders, as a rule at least once a year, to encourage them to live by faith, comfort them in adversity and warn them against errors in doctrine and life. *(See Art 23.c)*
- c. The session shall ensure that pastoral care is extended to country members and those members who live temporarily outside the congregation, such as members of the armed forces, sailors, students, nurses, patients in hospitals and those in prisons. *(See Art 23.c)*

Article 67 – Membership of Those Who Move

- a. Communicant members or members by baptism who move into a new locality should be encouraged to join the nearest congregation of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia.
- b. Members who move to areas where there is no Christian Reformed Church are encouraged either:
 - i. to remain members in their original Christian Reformed Church and participate in a local Christian church, if advisable; or,
 - ii. have their certificates of membership issued to them in order to join the Christian Reformed Church, or church in ecclesiastical fellowship, nearest to their new place of residence; or,
 - iii. to join a faithful local Christian church.

Article 68 – Membership Transfers

- a. Communicant members or members by baptism who transfer to another congregation of the Christian Reformed Churches of Australia, or to churches recognised as churches in ecclesiastical fellowship, are entitled to the appropriate certificate of membership issued by the session. The session shall attach to it such notations as are necessary and shall, as a rule, send the certificate to the session of the church to which the member is moving. *(See Art 62.b)*
- b. Certificates of membership shall be signed by the chairman and clerk of the session.
- c. When a baptised or communicant member moves to another area without requesting a certificate, the session shall advise the session of the church nearest to the member's new place of residence.
- d. When baptised or communicant members choose to join a church not in ecclesiastical fellowship, the session should, upon request, provide an appropriate statement of membership for that specific situation.

Article 69 – Membership Records

Each session shall keep a complete record of the arrivals and departures of members and shall record all births, deaths, baptisms, professions of faith, marriages and excommunications and other terminations of membership.

Article 70 – Solemnisation of Marriage

- a. Sessions shall admonish and instruct those under their spiritual care to marry only in the Lord.
- b. Christian marriages should be solemnised with appropriate admonitions, vows and prayers as provided for in the form for the solemnisation of marriage prescribed by the synod. As a rule, marriages should be solemnised in a public worship service. In exceptional cases, the solemnisation may take place in a private gathering of relatives and friends.
- c. Ministers shall not solemnise any marriage without prior approval by the session.

Article 71 – Funerals

Although funerals are primarily family affairs, sessions should endeavour to have the Word of God preached at such times.

Article 72 – Kingdom Involvement

The session shall diligently encourage the members of the church to be involved in activities which promote the Kingdom of God, such as the establishment and maintenance of Christian schools.

Section D – Missions

Article 73 – The Mission of the Church

In fulfilling the mandate given by Christ, each session shall stimulate the members of the congregation to be witnesses for Christ in word and deed, and to support the work of missions within Australia and overseas by their prayers, gifts and involvement.

Article 74 – Local Evangelism

Each church shall, under the sponsorship and direction of the session, bring the gospel to unbelievers in the community in word and deed. *(See Art 23.f)*

Article 75 – Outreach, Aid and Development

- a. In order to encourage and assist the churches in their outreach, aid and development, the synod shall maintain a committee charged with this task.
- b. Where a church or churches seek to send out long-term workers to participate in an outreach, aid or development project they shall, under the guidance of this committee, set up a workgroup representing the churches involved to determine the nature of the involvement and supervise the support of their workers.
- c. Outreach, aid or development projects seeking classis or synod support must have the approval of the classis or synod.

PART IV

THE ADMONITION AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH

Section A – General Provisions

Article 76 – Purpose

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 honour.

Article 77 – Nature

- a. All members of the church are responsible to watch over, encourage and admonish one another in love.
- b. The session shall instruct and remind members of these responsibilities and foster a spirit of love and openness within the congregation so that those who err in doctrine or life may be led to repentance and reconciliation.
- c. The session 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 18:15-18.
- d. Where Christian discipline is necessary, it is to be exercised exclusively by spiritual means. Disciplinary measures shall be applied only after an adequate investigation has been made and the person involved has been given ample opportunity to present his/her case.

Section B – The Admonition and Discipline of Members

Article 78 – Baptised Members Who do Not Confess Their Faith

- a. Baptised members who neglect to make public profession of faith should be encouraged to do so.
- b. Baptised members who are delinquent in doctrine or life should be lovingly instructed and corrected in order to show them the error of their way. If after painstaking admonition they do not heed the session, they shall be removed from the church membership in accordance with synodical regulations. They should be warned that persistent delinquency in doctrine and life excludes them from the kingdom of heaven.
- c. Baptised members who have been removed from the church membership and who subsequently repent of their sin shall be received again into the church only upon public profession of their faith.

Article 79 – The Discipline of Communicant Members

- a. Silent censure – Communicant members who have offended in doctrine or in life and who obstinately reject the admonitions of the session shall be barred from partaking of the Lord’s Supper, from responding to the baptismal questions, and from exercising all other rights of membership.
- b. Removal of silent censure – Communicant members who have offended in doctrine or in life and who have responded favourably to the admonitions of the session shall be reconciled to the church upon sufficient evidence of repentance.
- c. Excommunication – Communicant members who are under silent censure and persist in disregarding the admonition of the session and show no sign of repentance, shall finally be excommunicated from the church and regarded as outside the Kingdom of heaven. Before excommunicating anyone, the session shall make three announcements, referring to the person’s unchristian life, and encouraging the congregation to pray for and admonish the person concerned.
 - i. In the first, the name of the sinner shall ordinarily⁶ not be mentioned.
 - ii. In the second, which requires the approval of the classis, his/her name shall be mentioned.
 - iii. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that unless the sinner repents, he/she will be excommunicated on a specified date. The excommunication shall take place in accordance with the form for excommunication prescribed by synod.
- d. Restoration of an excommunicated member – When a person who has been excommunicated desires to be reconciled to the church, the session, having satisfied itself as to the sincerity of his/her repentance, shall announce this fact to the congregation. If no valid objections are presented, he/she shall be restored to the fellowship of the church in accordance with the form for re-admission prescribed by synod.

⁶ As used throughout the Church Order it implies that only in particular or exceptional circumstances can exceptions be made.

Section C – The Admonition and Discipline of Office Bearers

Article 80 – Temporary Relief of Duties

- a. In the case of serious accusation or suspicion, an office bearer may be temporarily relieved of duties by the session, but only with the agreement of the session of the nearest church in the same classis. If the neighbouring session does not agree, the session shall present the case to the classis.
- b. This action shall not have a disciplinary character and shall be for a specified period during which the appropriate assemblies shall thoroughly investigate the accusation.
- c. If the accusation is unfounded, the session shall return the office bearer to duties and publicly affirm the person's good standing.
- d. If the accusation is substantiated, the session shall apply special discipline.

Article 81 – Special Discipline

- a. Special discipline shall be applied to office bearers if they violate the Form of Subscription, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any other way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.
- b. Special discipline consists of suspension and/or deposition from office. General discipline may not be applied to office bearers unless they are under special discipline.
- c. The appropriate assembly (session or classis) shall determine whether an office bearer subject to special discipline shall be suspended or immediately deposed from office.
- d. The session that places an office bearer under special discipline shall make every effort to bring the erring person to repentance by means of loving rebuke and admonition.

Article 82 – Suspension from Office

- a. An office bearer who is suspended shall be prevented from exercising the duties and privileges pertaining to office. General discipline may also be applied at the discretion of the session.
- b. The suspension from office shall be lifted where there is sufficient evidence of true repentance and sanctification. It must further be evident that this would be for the true welfare of the church. Only the assembly that imposed the suspension may lift it.
- c. A suspended office bearer who does not give heed to the rebuke and admonition of the session shall be deposed from office.

Article 83 – Deposition from Office

- a. In the case of elders and deacons, a deposition shall not take place without the consent of the classis. For ministers, the agreement of the synodical deputies is also required. *(See Art 51)*
- b. A deposed office bearer shall not be restored to office without sufficient evidence of genuine repentance and sanctification. It must further be evident that the restoration to office would be for the true welfare of the church.
- c. The judgment as to whether a deposed minister shall subsequently be declared eligible for call shall be made by the classis that deposed him, subject to the agreement of the synodical deputies. *(See Art 51)*

Article 84 – Discipline of Ministers in General and Special Service

- a. A minister who is a member of a church other than that with which he is connected by virtue of his office is subject to the admonition and discipline of the sessions of both congregations. Either session may initiate disciplinary action, but neither shall act without conferring with the other.

- b. If the sessions disagree, the case shall be submitted to the classis of the church with which he is connected by virtue of his office. Only this classis has the authority to depose such a minister subject to the agreement of the synodical deputies. *(See Art 51)*

Article 85 – Authority of Major Assemblies in Abnormal Situations

In exceptional circumstances, a major assembly may suspend or depose office bearers even when such action has not been initiated by the session. A major assembly may so act only when part of either the session or the congregation appeals to it for assistance and cooperation on such serious grounds as misgovernment by the session, neglect or abuse of duty, or the tolerance or promotion of false doctrine. The session shall be notified of such an appeal.

CONCLUSION

Article 86 – Lording Over One Another

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