

CHURCH ORDER (3RD EDITION)

Church Order

of the

United Reformed Churches in North America

Third Edition, 2004

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Introduction

We as a federation of churches declare complete subjection and obedience to the Word of God delivered to us in the inspired, infallible and inerrant book of Holy Scripture. We believe and are fully persuaded that the Reformed Creeds do fully agree with this Word of God and therefore do subscribe to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. We acknowledge Jesus Christ to be the supreme and only Head of the Church. This headship is exercised in the churches by His Word and Spirit through the God-ordained offices, for the sake of the purity of doctrine and the holiness of life. The churches of the federation, although distinct, voluntarily display their unity by means of a common confession and church order. This is expressed as they cooperate and exercise mutual concern for one another. Since we desire to honor the apostolic command that in the churches all things are to be done decently and in good order (1 Cor. 14:40), we order our ecclesiastical relations and activities in the following articles covered under the following divisions:

Ecclesiastical Offices (Articles 1-15);

Ecclesiastical Assemblies (Articles 16-36);

Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks (Articles 37-50);

Ecclesiastical Discipline (Articles 51-66).

I. Ecclesiastical Offices

Article 1

Christ has instituted three offices in the church: minister of the Word, elder and deacon.

Article 2

The duties belonging to the office of minister of the Word consist of continuing in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, administering the sacraments, catechizing the youth, and assisting the elders in the shepherding and discipline of the congregation.

Article 3

Competent men should be urged to study for the ministry of the Word. A man who is a member of a church of the federation and who aspires to the ministry must evidence genuine godliness to his Consistory, which shall assume supervision of all aspects of his training, including his licensure to exhort, and assure that he receives a thoroughly reformed theological education. The council of his church should help him ensure that his financial needs are met. (See Appendix 1.)

Article 4

At the conclusion of such training, a student must approach his Consistory to become a candidate for the ministry of the Word, which shall arrange for his examination at a meeting of the classis of which his Consistory is a participant. No one shall be declared a candidate for the ministry until he has sustained an examination at a meeting of this classis, in the presence of his Consistory, of his Christian faith and experience, of his call to the ministry, of his knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, both in the original languages and in English translations, of the Three Forms of Unity, of Christian doctrine, Christian ethics and church history; of the Church Order, and of his knowledge and aptitude with regard to the particular duties and responsibilities of the minister of the Word, especially the preparation and preaching of sermons. Upon sustaining this exam in the presence of his Consistory and with the concurring advice of the delegates to this meeting of classis, his Consistory shall declare him a candidate for the office of minister of the Word. (See Appendix 2.)

Article 5

A man who is not a member of a church of the federation who seeks candidacy shall place himself under the supervision of a Consistory which shall make provision for his candidacy examination. (See Appendix 2.)

Article 6

The lawful calling to the office of minister of those who have not previously been in that office consists of:

First, the election by the council of one who has been declared a candidate according to the regulations prescribed herein, after having prayed and received the advice of the congregation;
Second, the examination of both doctrine and life, which shall be conducted to the satisfaction of the delegates to the classis of which the calling church is a participant, according to the regulations adopted by the federation (see Appendix 3);
Finally, the public ordination before the congregation, which shall take place with appropriate instructions, admonitions, prayers and subscription to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, followed with the laying on of hands by the ministers who are present and by the elders of the congregation, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

Article 7

Those who are already ordained ministers within the federation may be called to another congregation in a manner consistent with the above rules, without the examination or the laying on of hands. Any minister receiving a call shall consult with his current council regarding that call. He may accept the call only with their consent. Upon receipt of proper credentials from the church he last served, he shall be installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form and shall subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription.

Article 8

A minister who has been ordained in a church outside the federation shall not be admitted to serve in a church within the federation without an examination conducted to the satisfaction of the classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation, whereupon he may be declared by classis eligible for call by his sponsoring Consistory. (See Appendix 4.)

Article 9

A minister of the Word is bound to the service of the churches for life and may change the nature of his labor only for weighty reasons, upon approval by his supervising council with the concurring advice of classis.

Article 10

Each church is to provide adequately for the minister of the Word and his family while he is serving that church, and should contribute toward the retirement and disability needs of its minister. Those who have retired from the active ministry shall retain the title and dignity of the office of minister of the Word.

Article 11

If, for reasons other than such as warrant ecclesiastical discipline, either a minister of the Word or the congregation he is serving desires to dissolve their pastoral relationship, that dissolution shall occur only upon mutually satisfactory conditions and only with the concurring advice of the classis. If the released minister desires to receive a call to serve another congregation, the council from whose service he is being released shall announce his eligibility for call, which eligibility shall be valid for no more than two years, whereafter he shall be honorably released from office. If the minister released from his congregation desires to leave his office in order to seek non-ministerial labor, he must receive the approval of the classis before doing so.

Article 12

The council shall present to the congregation nominations for the offices of elder and deacon. Only male confessing members who meet the biblical requirements for office and indicate their agreement with the Form of Subscription shall be nominated by the council. Prior to making nominations, the council may give the congregation opportunity to direct attention to suitable men.

Article 13

Elders and deacons shall be elected to a term specified by the Consistory, and upon subscribing to the Three Forms of Unity by signing the Form of Subscription, shall be ordained or installed with the use of the appropriate liturgical form before entering upon their work.

Article 14

The duties belonging to the office of elder consist of continuing in prayer and ruling the church of Christ according to the principles taught in Scripture, in order that purity of doctrine and holiness of life may be practiced. They shall see to it that their fellow-elders, the minister(s) and the deacons faithfully discharge their offices. They are to maintain the purity of the Word and Sacraments, assist in catechizing the youth, promote God-centered schooling, visit the members of the congregation according to their needs, engage in family visiting, exercise discipline in the congregation, actively promote the work of evangelism and missions, and insure that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 15

The duties belonging to the office of deacon consist of continuing in prayer and supervising the works of Christian mercy among the congregation; acquainting themselves with congregational needs; exhorting members of the congregation to show mercy; gathering and managing the offerings of God's people in Christ's name, and distributing these offerings according to need; and encouraging and comforting with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's mercy. Needs of those outside the congregation, especially of other believers, should also be considered as resources permit. The deacons shall ordinarily meet every month to transact the business pertaining to their office, and they shall render an account of their work to the Consistory.

II. Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Article 16

Among churches belonging to the federation, three assemblies shall be recognized: the Consistory, the classis and the synod. Classis and synod are broader assemblies that exist only when meeting by delegation. Only the Consistory is a continuing body.

Article 17

In all assemblies only ecclesiastical matters shall be transacted, only in an ecclesiastical manner.

Article 18

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin and end with prayer.

Article 19

In every assembly there shall be a chairman, assisted by a vice-chairman. It is the chairman's duty to state and explain clearly the matters to be dealt with, and to ensure that the stipulations of the Church Order are followed and that every delegate observes due order and decorum in speaking. In all delegated assemblies the above named functions shall cease when the assembly adjourns.

Article 20

In every assembly there shall be a clerk whose task it shall be to keep an accurate record of the proceedings. In the broader assemblies the clerk shall serve for a term to be specified by the body. Between broader assembly meetings, the clerk shall perform his duties under the supervision of the next convening Consistory.

Article 21

In each congregation there shall be a Consistory composed of the minister(s) of the Word and the elders, which shall ordinarily meet at least once a month. The Consistory is the only assembly in the church(es) whose decisions possess direct authority within the congregation, since the Consistory receives its authority directly from Christ, and thereby is directly accountable to Christ.

Article 22

When a congregation is organized within the federation, this shall take place under the supervision of a neighboring Consistory and with the concurring advice of the classis.

Article 23

When the deacons meet together with the Consistory, the body is referred to as the council. The council shall exercise such duties described in the Church Order or such duties delegated to it by the Consistory. The council shall operate under the authority of the Consistory.

Article 24

Although congregations are distinct and equal and do not have dominion over each other, they ought to preserve fellowship with each other because they are all united with Christ, the spiritual and governing Head of the church. Congregations manifest this unity when they meet together in the broader assemblies.

Article 25

Those delegated to the broader assemblies shall be seated only with properly signed credentials, and each delegate shall have only one vote. In the broader assemblies only those matters that could not be settled in the narrower assemblies, or that pertain to the churches of the broader assembly in common, shall be considered. All such matters shall originate with a Consistory and be considered by classis before being considered by synod. No broader assembly shall have the power to depose an office-bearer or otherwise exercise church discipline, since these powers belong to the Consistory.

Article 26

A classis shall consist of neighboring churches whose Consistories delegate two of their members with proper credentials to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis meeting, within the next twelve months. If three Consistories in the classis deem it necessary that a classis meet earlier than the regular time determined, the Consistory charged with

convening the meeting shall determine when and where the meeting is to occur. The churches shall take turns providing a chairman and acting as the convening church.

Furthermore, the classis shall inquire of each Consistory whether Consistory and deacons' meetings are held, the Word of God is faithfully preached, the sacraments are faithfully administered, church discipline is exercised, the poor are cared for, and God-centered schooling is promoted; and whether the Consistory needs the advice and help of the classis for the proper government of the church.

Each classis shall inform the other classes regarding matters of mutual concern by forwarding its minutes to them in a timely manner.

Article 27

Each Consistory of the classis shall invite two experienced office-bearers appointed by classis, either two ministers or a minister and an elder, to visit the council once every two years, who shall give account of their visit to the classis. These visitors shall inquire whether the office-bearers faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe in all things the adopted order, and properly promote as much as lies in them, by word and deed, the edification of the congregation, including the youth, to the end that these visitors may fraternally admonish those office-bearers who have in anything been negligent, and may by their advice and assistance help direct all things unto the peace, edification and greatest profit of the churches.

Article 28

The churches shall meet as a synod at least once every three years. Each Consistory shall delegate two of its members to this meeting. Each synod shall determine a time and place for the subsequent synod and shall authorize a Consistory to convene that synod. If a majority of the classes deem it necessary that a synod meet earlier than the regular time determined, the Consistory charged with convening the meeting shall determine when and where the meeting is to occur.

Article 29

If any assembly complains of having been wronged by the decision of another assembly, it shall have the right to appeal to the broader assemblies. An individual's appeal must proceed first to the Consistory, and only then, if necessary, to a broader assembly. All decisions of a broader assembly are to be received with respect and submission, and shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they are in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. Consistories who are convinced that they cannot comply with a decision of a broader assembly because it does not agree with the Word of God cannot be compelled to do so, provided that they state to the classis the points at which the decision of the assembly disagrees with the Word of God. If a Consistory refuses to comply with the final decision of the synod and a subsequent synod rules by majority vote that submission in the matter is essential for the unity of the churches, the congregation is no longer eligible for membership in the federation.

Article 30

Having availed herself of the avenues for appeal, a church through its Consistory may withdraw from the federation at any time by submitting a written statement to the classis to which the church belongs.

Article 31

If any church member complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a narrower assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the broader assemblies. Until a decision is made upon such appeal, the church member shall conform to the determination and judgment already passed.

Article 32

Any church may be admitted into the federation provided that its office-bearers subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and agree with this Church Order, and its minister sustains an examination by the nearest classis, according to the regulations adopted by the federation. Any such church shall be provisionally accepted into membership in the federation by the classis, pending ratification by the following synod.

Article 33

Whereas it is the sole right of a congregation to hold title to its property, the ownership of all property, real and personal, held by a congregation of this federation is vested exclusively in that congregation, and title shall be taken in its name alone. Each congregation shall have exclusive control over all of its temporalities, nor shall the exercise of its property rights, through the decisions of its Consistory, be subject to the supervision of the broader assemblies, nor shall the broader assemblies have the right to revise those decisions. The broader assemblies of the federation shall not attempt to secure possession of the property of any congregation, whether or not such congregation remains within, chooses to withdraw from, or is removed from the federation.

Article 34

Churches are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with Reformed congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and demonstrate faithful allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Each church is to give an account of its ecumenical activities to classis. Fraternal activities between congregations which need not be reported to classis may include occasional pulpit exchanges, table fellowship, as well as other means of manifesting unity.

Article 35

The churches of a classis may, as a group, enter into ecumenical relations with an individual church or group of churches such as a classis or presbytery. The classis shall keep synod informed of such ecumenical relations, thereby honoring our federative bond.

Article 36

The federation may enter into ecumenical relations with other federations by synodical decision. Such a decision must be ratified by a majority of the Consistories.

III. Ecclesiastical Functions and Tasks

Article 37

The Consistory shall call the congregation together for corporate worship twice on each Lord's Day. Special services may be called in observance of Christmas Day, Good Friday, Ascension Day, a day of prayer, the national Thanksgiving Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, as well as in times of great distress or blessing. Attention should also be given to Easter and Pentecost on their respective Lord's Days.

Article 38

The Consistory shall regulate the worship services, which shall be conducted according to the principles taught in God's Word: namely, that the preaching of the Word have the central place, that confession of sins be made, praise and thanksgiving in song and prayer be given, and gifts of gratitude be offered.

Article 39

The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches. Hymns which faithfully and fully reflect the teaching of the Scripture as expressed in the Three Forms of Unity may be sung, provided they are approved by the Consistory.

Article 40

At one of the services each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, with special attention given to the Heidelberg Catechism by treating its Lord's Days in sequence.

Article 41

The covenant of God shall be signified and sealed to the children of confessing members in good standing through holy baptism administered by the minister of the Word in a service of corporate worship, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. The Consistory shall properly supervise the administration of the sacrament, which shall be administered as soon as feasible.

Article 42

Adults who have not been baptized shall receive holy baptism upon public profession of faith, with the use of the appropriate liturgical forms, and be thus accepted as members. They shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Article 43

Baptized members who have been instructed in the faith and who have come to the years of understanding shall be encouraged to make public profession of faith in Jesus Christ. Those who wish to profess their faith shall be interviewed to the satisfaction of the Consistory concerning doctrine and life, and their public profession of faith shall occur in a public worship service after adequate announcement to the congregation and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Thereby baptized members are accepted into full communion in the congregation

and shall be obliged to persevere in the fellowship of the church, not only in hearing God's Word, but also in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Article 44

Persons coming from other denominations shall be admitted to communicant membership only after the Consistory has examined them concerning doctrine and life. The Consistory shall determine in each case whether public profession of faith shall be required. Their names shall be announced to the congregation two weeks prior to reception, in order that the congregation may have opportunity, if necessary, to bring lawful objections to the attention of the Consistory.

Article 45

The Consistory shall supervise participation at the Lord's Table. No member shall be admitted to the Lord's Table who has not first made public profession of faith and is not living a godly life. Visitors may be admitted provided that, as much as possible, the Consistory is assured of their biblical church membership, of their proper profession of faith, and of their godly walk.

Article 46

The Consistory shall ordinarily administer the Lord's Supper at least every three months in a service of corporate worship, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. This administration shall conform to the teaching of God's Word and the regulations of ecclesiastical order, in such a manner as is most conducive to the edification of the congregation.

Article 47

The church's missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. When this task is to be performed beyond the field of an organized church, it is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor, who are called, supported and supervised by their Consistories. The churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries.

Article 48

Consistories shall instruct and admonish those under their spiritual care who are considering marriage to marry in the Lord. Christian marriages should be solemnized with appropriate admonitions, promises and prayers, under the regulation of the Consistory, with the use of the appropriate liturgical form. Ministers shall not solemnize marriages which would conflict with the Word of God.

Article 49

A Christian funeral is neither a service of corporate worship nor subject to ecclesiastical government, but is a family matter, and should be conducted accordingly.

Article 50

The Consistory shall maintain accurate membership records which include names and dates of baptisms, professions of faith, marriages and deaths of members of the congregation.

IV. Ecclesiastical Discipline

Article 51

Since Christian discipline is spiritual in nature and exempts no one from trial or punishment by the civil authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censure, that God may be glorified, that the sinner may be reconciled with God, the church and his neighbor, and that offense may be removed from the church of Christ.

Article 52

In case anyone errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character and does not give public offense, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed.

Article 53

Secret sins from which the sinner repents after being admonished by one person in private or in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be made known to the Consistory.

Article 54

If anyone has been admonished in love by two or three persons concerning a secret sin and does not repent, or if he has committed a public sin, the matter shall be brought to the Consistory.

Article 55

Anyone whose sin is properly made known to the Consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the Scriptural admonitions of the Consistory, shall be suspended from all privileges of church membership, including the use of the sacraments. After such suspension and subsequent admonitions, and before proceeding to excommunication, the impenitence of the sinner shall be publicly made known to the congregation, the offense explained, together with the care bestowed upon him and repeated admonitions, so that the congregation may speak to him and pray for him. This shall be done in three steps. In the first, the name of the sinner need not be mentioned, that he be somewhat spared. In the second, the Consistory shall seek the advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon his name shall be mentioned. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that, unless he repents, he will be excluded from the fellowship of the church, so that his excommunication, if he remains impenitent, may take place with the full knowledge of the church. The interval between the steps shall be left to the discretion of the Consistory.

Article 56

If these steps of discipline, having been carried out in a loving manner, do not bring about repentance, but rather harden the sinner in his ways, the Consistory shall proceed to the extreme remedy, namely, excommunication, in agreement with the Word of God and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

Article 57

The restoration of a sinner whose sins are public, or have become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place upon sufficient evidence of repentance, in such manner as the Consistory shall deem conducive to the edification of the church. Whether in particular cases this should take place in public shall, when there is a difference of opinion about it within the Consistory, be decided with the advice of two neighboring churches of the classis.

Article 58

Whenever anyone who has been excommunicated desires to become reconciled to the church by way of penitence, it shall be announced to the congregation in order that, insofar as no one can allege anything against him to the contrary, he may, with profession of his repentance, be publicly reinstated with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

Article 59

Mature members by baptism who are delinquent in doctrine or life shall be admonished and, if they persist, shall be excluded from the church of Christ. The advice of classis must be sought before proceeding to such exclusion.

Article 60

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

Article 61

When a minister, elder or deacon has committed a public or gross sin, or refuses to heed the admonitions of the Consistory, he shall be suspended from his office by his own Consistory with the concurring advice of the Consistories of two neighboring churches. Should he harden himself in his sin, or when the sin committed is of such a nature that he cannot continue in office, he shall be deposed by his Consistory with the concurring advice of classis.

Article 62

Included among the gross sins, but not to the exclusion of all others, which are worthy of suspension or deposition from office, are these: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre, in short, all sins and gross offenses which render the perpetrators infamous before the world and which in any other member of the church would occasion excommunication.

Article 63

The ministers, elders and deacons shall exercise mutual censure regularly, whereby they exhort one another in an edifying manner regarding the discharge of their offices.

Article 64

Those who seek membership in another congregation shall request in writing that their current Consistory send to the receiving Consistory an official letter including pertinent membership information and testimony concerning doctrine and life.

Article 65

No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, and no office-bearers shall lord it over other office-bearers.

Article 66

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they ought to be observed diligently. If it be found that God may be more honored and the churches better served by changing any article, this shall require a two-thirds vote of a synod and shall be ratified by two-thirds of the Consistories prior to the next synodical meeting, after which meeting they shall take effect.

Appendix 1

Guidelines for a Licensure Exam

1. CREDENTIALS

- a. A seminary faculty recommendation
- b. A brief statement of personal faith and confessional commitment

2. PROCEDURE

- a. The prospective licentiate must apply to his Consistory for the exam, securing the required credentials. At least thirty days before the exam, the Consistory is to announce publicly its intention to examine the prospective licentiate, providing opportunity for other Consistories to render observation and/or objections.
- b. The prospective licentiate must be examined by his Consistory, and the successful completion of the exam will be certified to other Consistories within the federation.
- c. An exhorting license is normally valid for one year, and extension may be requested annually in writing and may require another interview.

3. CONTENT

- a. The prospective licentiate must submit two written sermons for review by his Consistory.
- b. The oral exam must address the following: first, the licentiate's godly walk; second, his commitment to the Reformed faith; third, his understanding of public worship; and fourth, matters of exegetical and homiletical method.

Appendix 2

Guidelines for a Candidacy Exam

1. CREDENTIALS

- a. A recommendation from the prospective candidate's council
- b. A medical evaluation of health
- c. A diploma certifying reception of a Master of Divinity degree or an equivalent academic degree
- d. A transcript of all seminary grades

e. A statement of testimony from the prospective candidate

2. PROCEDURE

a. The prospective candidate's Consistory must request a meeting of classis for this exam.

b. The inviting Consistory must circulate copies of the required credentials among the Consistories of classis.

c. The inviting Consistory must make known that the candidate has sustained his candidacy exam and is available for call to the churches.

d. If the candidacy exam is sustained, and should the candidate accept a call within the same classis, the ordination exam is ordinarily waived, to avoid duplication of work within the classis. Taking note of this possibility, delegates hearing the candidacy exam should determine whether the performance is sufficient to warrant such a waiver.

3. CONTENT

a. The prospective candidate must submit three written sermons for evaluation. Two of these must be on an assigned Old Testament text and an assigned New Testament text. The third sermon must be a catechism sermon on a Lord's Day or question and answer of his choosing. One of these sermons must be preached in a public worship service.

b. The two areas to be covered in this exam are (1) biblical and confessional commitment, and (2) ministerial competence. The former regards the prospective candidate's knowledge of and loyalty to Scripture and the Confessions; the latter investigates his theological and ministerial knowledge and ability. This exam should, therefore, investigate the following specific areas: (1) Practica: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life, his relationship with the Lord, his growth in faith, his background and preparation for ministry, his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking entrance thereto, liturgics, homiletics, pastoral care, evangelism and church polity.

(2) Bible knowledge: the prospective candidate's doctrine of Scripture, canonicity, hermeneutics, etc., and familiarity with the contents of the various books of the Bible.

(3) Biblical exegesis: an Old Testament and a New Testament passage should be assigned to the prospective candidate at least three week in advance (one of them in connection with one of his assigned sermons); the examiner should inquire concerning the meaning of the text and the prospective candidate's ability to work with the original languages and with a suitable exegetical method.

(4) Confessional knowledge: the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, the prospective candidate's willingness to subscribe to them by signing the Form of Subscription.

(5) Reformed doctrine: the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine (Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology).

(6) Church history: the flow of church history, in terms of major persons, heresies, etc., with special emphasis on the Reformation and the history of the Reformed churches.

(7) Ethics: the meaning and function of the Decalogue, also in relation to Christian motivation and character, and to contemporary moral problems.

Appendix 3

Guidelines for an Ordination Exam

1. CREDENTIAL: A valid letter of call

2. PROCEDURE

a. Exceptional case: If the ordination exam would occur in the same classis in which the candidacy exam was sustained, then the ordination exam may be waived by the delegates conducting the candidacy exam.

b. The candidate's calling Consistory must invite classis to participate in an ordination exam.

c. The candidate is to preach a sermon in a public worship service which he conducts under the auspices of his calling Consistory.

d. Upon sustaining the exam, the classis shall declare the candidate eligible to be ordained as a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America.

3. CONTENT

The two areas to be covered in this exam are (1) biblical and confessional commitment, and (2) ministerial competence. The former regards the prospective candidate's knowledge of and loyalty to Scripture and the Confessions; the latter investigates his theological and ministerial knowledge and ability. This exam should, therefore, investigate the following specific areas:

(1) Practica: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life, his relationship with the Lord, his growth in faith, his background and preparation for ministry, his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking entrance thereto, liturgics, homiletics, pastoral care, and evangelism.

(2) Church polity: the history and principles of Reformed church polity, and the content of the Church Order.

(3) Confessional knowledge: the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, concerning the prospective candidate's willingness to subscribe to them by signing the Form of Subscription.

(4) Reformed doctrine: the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine (Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology).

(5) Ethics: the meaning and function of the Decalogue, also in relation to Christian motivation and character, and to various contemporary moral problems.

Appendix 4

Guidelines for a Colloquium Doctum

1. CREDENTIALS: two letters of request and information relating to the background and circumstances of the relationship, one from the examinee and one from the sponsoring Consistory.

2. PROCEDURE

a. The calling Consistory must invite classis to participate in a colloquium doctum.

b. The examinee is to preach a sermon in a public worship service which he conducts under the auspices of his sponsoring Consistory.

c. Upon sustaining the colloquium doctum, the classis shall declare the minister eligible to be called by the sponsoring Consistory as a minister of the Word and sacraments among the United Reformed Churches in North America.

3. CONTENT

The two areas to be covered in this exam are (1) biblical and confessional commitment, and (2) ministerial competence. The former regards the prospective candidate's knowledge of and loyalty to Scripture and the Confessions; the latter investigates his theological and ministerial knowledge and ability. This exam should, therefore, investigate the following specific areas:

(1) Practica: the prospective candidate's personal and spiritual life, his relationship with the Lord, his growth in faith, his background and preparation for ministry, his understanding of ministerial office and his motives for seeking entrance thereto, liturgics, homiletics, pastoral care, and evangelism.

(2) Church polity: the history and principles of Reformed church polity, and the content of the Church Order.

(3) Confessional knowledge: the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, concerning the prospective candidate's willingness to subscribe to them by signing the Form of Subscription.

(4) Reformed doctrine: the teaching of Scripture and the Confessions regarding the six major areas of Reformed doctrine (Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology).

(5) Ethics: the meaning and function of the Decalogue, also in relation to Christian motivation and character, and to various contemporary moral problems.

Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government

1. The church is the possession of Christ, who is the Mediator of the New Covenant.

Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:25-27

2. As Mediator of the New Covenant, Christ is the Head of the church.

Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18

3. Because the church is Christ's possession and He is its Head, the principles governing the church are not a matter of human preference, but of divine revelation.

Matthew 28:18-20; Colossians 1:18

4. The universal church possesses a spiritual unity in Christ and in the Holy Scriptures.

Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; I Timothy 3:15; II John 9

5. The Lord gave no permanent universal, national or regional offices to His church. The office of elder (presbyter/episkopos) is clearly local in authority and function; thus, Reformed church government is presbyterial, since the church is governed by elders, not by broader assemblies.

Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5

6. In its subjection to its heavenly Head, the local church is governed by Christ from heaven, by means of His Word and Spirit, with the keys of the kingdom which He has given it for that purpose; and it is not subject to rule by sister churches who, with it, are subject to the one Christ.

Matthew 16:19; Acts 20:28-32; Titus 1:5

7. Federative relationships do not belong to the essence or being of the church; rather, they serve the well-being of the church. However, even though churches stand distinctly next to one another, they do not thereby stand disconnectedly alongside one another. Entrance into and departure from a federative relationship is strictly a voluntary matter.

Acts 15:1-35; Romans. 15:25-27; Colossians 4:16; Titus 1:5; Revelation 1:11, 20

8. The exercise of a federative relationship is possible only on the basis of unity in faith and in confession.

I Corinthians 10:14-22; Gal. 1:6-9; Ephesians 4:16-17

9. Member churches meet together in consultation to guard against human imperfections and to benefit from the wisdom of a multitude of counselors in the broader assemblies. The decisions of such assemblies derive their authority from their conformity to the Word of God.

Proverbs 11:14; Acts 15:1-35; I Corinthians 13:9-10; II Timothy 3:16-17

10. In order to manifest our spiritual unity, local churches should seek the broadest possible contacts with other like-minded churches for their mutual edification and as an effective witness to the world.

John 17:21-23; Ephesians 4:1-6

11. The church is mandated to exercise its ministry of reconciliation by proclaiming the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; II Corinthians 5:18-21

12. Christ cares for His church through the office-bearers whom He chooses.

Acts 6:2-3; I Timothy 3:1,8; 5:17

13. The Scriptures encourage a thorough theological training for the ministers of the Word.

I Timothy 4:16; II Timothy 2:14-16; 3:14; 4:1-5

14. Being the chosen and redeemed people of God, the church, under the supervision of the elders, is called to worship Him according to the Scriptural principles governing worship.

Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Psalm 95:1,2,6; Psalm 100:4; John 4:24; I Peter 2:9

15. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, it is called through the teaching ministry to build up the people of God in faith.

Deuteronomy 11:19; Ephesians 4:11-16; I Timothy 4:6; II Timothy 2:2; 3:16-17

16. Christian discipline, arising from God's love for His people, is exercised in the church to correct and strengthen the people of God, maintain the unity and the purity of the church of Christ, and thereby bring honor and glory to God's name.

I Timothy 5:20; Titus 1:13; Hebrews 12:7-11

17. The exercise of Christian discipline is first of all a personal duty of every child of God, but when discipline by the church becomes necessary, it must be exercised by the elders of the church, the bearers of the keys of the kingdom.

Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 20:28; I Corinthians 5:13; I Peter 5:1-3

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