

Directory for Church Government

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the *Directory* is to provide the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America definitions and procedures to implement the doctrinal statements concerning the nature of the church and its government, as they have been stated in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*. For the purposes of this Directory, “fundamental law” refers to the *Westminster Confession* and *Catechisms* and the *Reformed Presbyterian Testimony*. The “law and order of the church” refers to the *Directory for Church Government*, the *Book of Discipline* and the *Directory for Worship* together with the actions of the Synod.

These definitions and procedures as set down in this *Directory* are to be received as official statements declaring the law and order of the church. The *Directory* may be amended by any given Synod by a two-thirds majority vote. If, however, Synod considers that the item before it should have the consideration and discussion of the sessions, it can by a simple majority vote decide to use the procedure of sending proposed amendments down in overture; however, any such amendments must be adopted by a two-thirds vote of the Synod before they can be sent down in overture to the sessions. The same amendment process shall be followed for *The Book of Discipline* and *The Directory of Public Worship*.

CHAPTER 1

The Communicant Membership of the Church

1. Any person capable of forming moral judgments and of making decisions for himself may be received into communicant membership in the Reformed Presbyterian Church, upon credible profession of faith, baptism, and acceptance of the Covenant of Church Membership. Communicant members have an obli-

gation to present their children for baptism and to do all in their power to rear their children so that they will seek communicant membership in the church.

2. In a regularly organized congregation it belongs to the session alone to admit to membership in the church. In extraordinary circumstances, such as the organization of a new congregation, presbytery may assume this function or delegate it to a temporary governing body. In the early stages of work in a foreign mission field, special powers may be exercised by the missionaries in this regard until such time as a congregation with a regular session can be organized.

3. Classes should be conducted, under the oversight of the session, for baptized children as well as for prospective members for their instruction in the principles of truth maintained by the Church with a view to preparing them to be communicant members.

4. Candidates for communicant membership shall be examined by the session in constituted court. The examination shall seek to bring out the degree of the candidate's knowledge of Divine truth, his personal sense of sin and need of salvation and his knowledge of and willing acceptance of the Covenant of Church Membership including the distinctive principles of the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The degree of knowledge necessary for admission depends, to a considerable extent, upon the capacity of the candidate and the opportunities which he has had for acquiring such knowledge. Children should be encouraged to memorize the *Shorter Catechism* and urged to read and study the *Testimony* and *Confession of Faith* as they come to years of fuller understanding. No one should be admitted who is ignorant of the plan of salvation, or who gives no credible evidence of having been born again, or who assumes an attitude antagonistic to the principles set forth in the standards of the Church.

5. When the candidates have given assent to the Covenant of Church Membership and when their examination has been sustained, they shall, if they have been baptized, be declared in communicant membership and may sign the Covenant of Church Membership. After prayer on their behalf, the members of the session shall welcome them by extending the right hand of fellowship.

6. Where there is no definite knowledge that a candidate has been baptized in a true church as defined by Synod (chap. 25 of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*), this sacrament shall be administered.

7. The new members should be publicly recognized. This may be done by having them stand before the congregation to give public assent to the Covenant of Church Membership. The congregation may be asked to join in giving assent to the Covenant. This question shall be addressed to the congregation: "Do you,

the members of this congregation, welcome into your fellowship these who have now professed their faith in Christ, and have been received by your session;

and do you promise to help and encourage them in the Christian life?" The congregation should respond, "We do." A few words of counsel may be given to the new members and prayer offered in their behalf.

8. Members should willingly consecrate their talents and gifts to the service of Christ. They should prayerfully consider accepting a position in the church when called to do so.

9. A member of any congregation of any Reformed Presbyterian Church, in this or other lands, may be received into communicant membership of any congregation of the church, upon presentation of a certificate from the session of his congregation. An applicant from another denomination shall satisfy the session of his acceptance of the basic truths of the historic Christian faith and of the Covenant of Church Membership. Certificates shall be valid for one year only from the date of issue, unless reasons can be shown for the delay in presenting them. If a certificate states exceptions, or grounds of censure, the applicant shall give full satisfaction to the session before being admitted.

10. Neglect of the ordinances should be a matter of church discipline; but where a member has, for a period of one year failed to attend, to contribute, or to give any other evidence of interest and cannot be contacted, he may be removed from the roll of communicant membership. The session officially shall attempt to notify him of that action. He may be restored to communicant membership when he has given credible evidence of adherence to the Covenant of Church Membership.

11. A member of the Church moving from one congregation to another congregation in the denomination shall be given a certificate of transfer of membership at his request. Notice shall also be given to the session of the congregation to which he desires transfer. A person leaving the membership of the Reformed Presbyterian Church shall also be given a certificate of transfer of membership including any qualifications the session has in its records.

12. If a member becomes a member of another denomination without a regular dismissal, the session shall record the fact and remove his name from the roll. If charges are pending against him these charges may be prosecuted.

13. A member certified to another congregation of the denomination is under the jurisdiction of the session issuing his certificate of membership until he has been received by the session to which he has been certified, but shall not be entitled to vote or hold office. A certificate of transfer of membership becomes effective immediately. A person restored to membership in a congregation by the return of a certificate of transfer to the session which issued it, is not entitled

to exercise the functions of any office previously held. He may, however, be re-elected to the same.

14. Presbytery may establish a temporary roll of membership. Such a roll may be used for a mission church or may authorize the temporary governing body to receive members on such a roll. It may also be used when a congregation becomes disorganized. It is to be considered a temporary roll. In the case of disorganization, those placed on the rolls of presbytery should become members of another congregation within one year. Diligent effort should be made to retain members in the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

CHAPTER 2

The Congregation

1. A congregation is organized on the basis of the standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and in conformity with its law and order. A fully organized congregation is made up of a group of members with a session of elders for the oversight of the congregation and a board of deacons responsible chiefly for the ministry of mercy and stewardship. The teaching elder/pastor is a member of the congregation and his ministerial credentials are held by the presbytery. Presbyteries are directed to exercise due care and diligence to see that both sessions and boards of deacons are duly chosen, ordained and established in every congregation under their care. All ordained officers shall be chosen by vote of the congregation, and every communicant member shall have an equal voice in such choice.

2. Children of communicant members of the Church, in consequence of their covenant relationship, shall receive baptism, pastoral care and instruction, and are baptized members of the Church, but are not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper until they have reached years of understanding and have voluntarily professed their faith in Christ and assumed for themselves the vows and obligations of the Covenant of Church Membership. Baptized members have no vote in the congregational meetings.

3. Persons, not members of the congregation, who regularly attend the services, participate in the worship, and contribute to the support are known as adherents. They have no vote in the congregational meetings.

4. In many states or provinces, congregations are required to have a Board of Trustees in whom the title of the church property is vested and who represent the congregation in all legal matters. The Board shall be elected from the membership of the congregation and shall have no duties beyond those necessary to fulfill the legal requirements. For efficiency in handling its affairs, the membership and officers of the Board of Trustees may be identical with or chosen from the Board of Deacons.

5. The session shall have general oversight and review of all organizations within the congregation. These may include a Sabbath school for study based on the Scriptures; a mid-week meeting; missionary and young people's societies, and other fellowship groups. There may be other organizations, as desired, provided they promote the principles, practices and ministries of the Church.

6. Every congregation is under special obligation to give religious instruction to the youth, to seek the salvation of the lost, and to declare the whole Gospel to all within its reach. A congregation has certain other responsibilities among which are: To elect its own elders and deacons; to transact its business; to require reports from its organizations, officers and committees; to petition the courts of the church for any action it may desire; to appeal from decisions of the lower courts to the higher; to maintain the ordinances of public worship; to provide a suitable place of worship and equipment to carry on its activities; to be obedient in the Lord to the law and order of the Church, with care to maintain a godly fellowship in love and loyalty and support to all its members and to the denomination.

7. An annual meeting of the congregation shall be held to hear reports and transact business. Special meetings may be called by the session either on its own volition, or at the written request of the board of deacons, or by petition of the congregation, if the purpose(s) be of sufficient importance and in accordance with the law and order of the Church. The purpose(s) of such meeting shall be stated in the notice, and no other business shall be transacted. Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at the public services on two preceding Lord's Days. If the congregation has no public meeting, ten days' notice by mail or other suitable means of communication shall be sufficient.

8. All congregational meetings shall be under the supervision of the session, either directly leading the meeting or overseeing the election of congregational officers to lead the meeting. The congregational meetings shall be governed according to the common rules as applied in ecclesiastical assemblies. The clerk of session or a congregational secretary shall record all proceedings in the minutes. Unless otherwise specified in the charter, one-fourth of the active resident communicant membership shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of ordinary business, but no business vitally affecting the welfare of the congregation should be transacted without the presence of at least one-half the active resident communicant membership. Meetings for the election of a teaching elder, ruling elders or deacons shall be under the supervision of the session in constituted court and presided over by its moderator.

9. A congregation becomes disorganized when the session is reduced to less than two resident elders. Two elders will suffice to hold the organization. The presbytery may enable the congregation to continue its existence by appointing an elder(s) from a neighboring congregation to act with the remaining resident elder as a provisional session until such time as a new elder(s) may be elected.

An alternative procedure is to reduce the congregation to a preaching station under the immediate supervision of presbytery.

10. Two congregations may agree to unite by a two-thirds majority vote in each congregation and with the sanction of presbytery. The plan of union shall provide for adjustment of the pastorates, of the sessions and boards of deacons, and of other congregational organizations. This plan shall be adopted by each congregation before being made effective by presbytery.

11. The congregation, or its boards, holds the property of the congregation in trust for the Synod and cannot divert it from the use to which it was originally intended. The property is in law a trust which the civil courts will protect. If a congregation wishes to change the location of its place of worship, it shall first secure the approval of presbytery both as to removal and as to the new location. A particular congregation shall not sell or mortgage property without the written permission of the presbytery transmitted through the session of the congregation. When a presbytery determines that a congregation is disorganized, title to all properties held by or for the congregation shall immediately be transferred to Synod's Board of Trustees who shall determine with the counsel of the appropriate presbytery the disposition of such properties and/or proceeds of the same. Distribution of assets or expenditures beyond the normal course of operation may not be made in anticipation of disorganization without prior approval of the presbytery and the Trustees of Synod. (For policies and procedures, see *1972 Minutes of Synod*, pages 13, 150-152.)

CHAPTER 3

The Officers of the Church

The Scriptures indicate no separation of office as regards the ruling and teaching that is to be carried on in Christ's church. According to their qualifications and circumstances elders will exhibit gifts that enable them to discern and meet the needs of the flock through oversight (ruling) and exhortation. Among them will be those more qualified to engage in the study and public proclamation of the Scriptures. This distinction of function warrants the continuance of the popular titles of "ruling elder" and "teaching elder" when understood as stated above. The office of deacon was given by the Holy Spirit to the New Testament church to assist the church in the fulfillment of its ministry.

I. ELDERS: RULING ELDERS

A. Qualifications

Those eligible to be called as ruling elders must:

1. Be male communicant members in good standing of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

2. Evidence the standards of character and conduct consistent with those set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7; in Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-3.
3. Be knowledgeable and committed to the subordinate doctrinal standards of the denomination as being consistent with the Scriptures.

B. Duties

The duties of ruling elders include:

1. Active pastoral care of the congregation.
2. Regular attendance and participation in session meetings.
3. Involvement in and oversight of the teaching ministry of the congregation.
4. Involvement in and oversight of the observance of the sacraments.
5. Training of the whole congregation to mature discipleship.
6. Ministry to the erring and lost.
7. Visitation to the sick and needy.
8. Dedication to the advancement of the whole church of Christ.
9. Regular participation in the higher courts of the church.
10. Meeting jointly with the board of deacons periodically for evaluation and growth in their respective ministries.

C. Privileges

The privileges of ruling elders include:

1. Moderation of any court of the church.
2. Permanent membership on his session.
3. Voting membership in the higher courts.
4. When deemed by his session or presbytery to be qualified in the areas of personal godliness, theology, Biblical knowledge and church history he would be eligible for:

- a. Occasional ministry of the Word in the congregation at the request of the session or at the request of another court.
 - b. Occasional ministry of the Word within the denomination where specifically requested by another court.
 - c. Occasional pronouncing of God's benediction upon His people.
5. A ruling elder may qualify for more regular occasional preaching of the Word and pronouncing the benediction at the appointment of his session or another court of the church by satisfying the presbytery of his readiness for this ministry by being examined in personal godliness, Bible Knowledge, systematic theology, and the preaching of an expository sermon. (See Eligibility to Preach, IIc2e).
6. Under extraordinary circumstances, to administer the sacraments when specifically appointed to do so on a given occasion by the presbytery.
7. Appointment, in special circumstances by presbytery, to serve as a provisional elder of another session.

D. Procedure for Election

1. Authorization

An election of ruling elders may be authorized as follows:

- a. The initiative for an election of elders must include one or more of the following:
 - (1) An appeal from the congregation to the session to increase the number of elders.
 - (2) A judgment of the session that there are qualified men in the congregation and that an increase in the number of elders is needed.
 - (3) A directive by presbytery for a session to hold an election under extraordinary circumstances.
- b. An election for elders is to be conducted by the session at a specially called meeting of the congregation.

2. Calling a Meeting

The procedure to call a meeting will be:

- a. The session shall issue an edict setting the date, time and place for an election.
- b. Eight days' notice of the meeting shall be given publicly to the congregation by reading of the edict at the worship services on the two preceding Lord's Days.
- c. If the congregation has no public meeting, ten days' notice by mail or phone to all members who can be reached shall be sufficient.

3. Order of Meeting

The order of the meeting shall be as follows:

- a. The congregation having been called together for the election, the session shall be constituted by the moderator or presbytery's appointee.
- b. The session shall have a complete list of all communicant members of the congregation in good standing from which a quorum is to be determined (one-half of the active communicant resident members). A quorum is necessary for each ballot.
- c. Inquiry by the moderator if the congregation still desires to proceed with the election.
- d. The final reading of the edict.
- e. Worship, with a sermon, shall be conducted under the direction of the session.
- f. The election shall be conducted.
- g. The court shall be adjourned with prayer.

4. Balloting

The election shall be conducted as follows:

- a. The session may indicate their judgment as to the number of positions to be filled by the election. Such judgment shall be based on the needs of the congregation and the evidence of spiritual maturity of potential candidates.
- b. Session may submit a list of nominations.
- c. If the session has indicated its desire for a certain number of elders, its list of nominees shall not contain less than that number.
- d. Nominations may also be made by a communicant member of the congregation present.
- e. The election may also proceed without nominations.
- f. Even when nominations have been made, votes may be cast for any qualified candidate.
- g. Voting shall be by ballot with the session taking due precaution to ensure the integrity of the vote.
- h. When the number to be elected is determined, the number of names per ballot is not to exceed the announced number to be elected.
- i. Communicant members unable to attend the meeting may send their votes in writing (also known as absentee votes), enclosed in sealed envelopes which bear their names and are addressed to the session. Absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot.
- j. The use of a nominating ballot is not encouraged; if it is used, absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot. Absentee votes will not be used on a nominating ballot.
- k. Only those receiving at least two-thirds of the votes cast shall be declared elders-elect. Blank ballots shall not be counted in determining the total number of votes cast. A ballot marked "No," indicating that the person desires not to vote for any candidate, should be counted in determining the total number of votes cast.
- l. If a two-thirds vote has not been reached after three ballots, the moderator, in consultation with the session, may postpone the election.

m. Two tellers shall be appointed by the moderator to collect the ballots and tabulate the results of the election and report to the moderator.

E. Procedure for Examination, Ordination and Installation

1. *Examination*

The examination of an elder-elect shall proceed as follows:

- a. The elder-elect shall notify the session, preferably within two weeks, regarding his intention to accept or decline the call of the congregation.
- b. If the elder-elect indicates his desire to accept the call, the session shall meet in constituted court to examine him with respect to his qualifications as stated above in section I.A.
- c. The elder-elect shall be examined in his soundness in the faith and commitment to the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*.
- d. If the session shall judge any elder-elect unfit for the office, it shall not proceed with his ordination and/or installation.
- e. Ordination will not be required if:
 - (1) An elder-elect holds ordination in the denomination as an elder.
 - (2) An elder-elect is certified as having been ordained to an equivalent office in another true branch of the visible church and has met our denominational conditions to be a ruling elder.
- f. Public ordination and/or installation to the session will be required of all elders-elect who have declared their desire to serve and have been examined and approved by the session.

2. *Authorization*

The session shall authorize the ordination and/or installation in the following manner:

- a. The session shall set the time, date and place for the ordination and installation of qualified elders-elect. (Any objections by the congregation shall be presented to the session in writing prior to the called meeting. Session shall act on the objection prior to the called meeting.)
- b. Notice of the date, time, location, and names of the elder(s)-elect shall be given by the installing session to all sessions within the presbytery.

3. *Calling a Meeting*

To call a meeting for ordination and/or installation:

- a. An edict shall be prepared by the session.
- b. The edict shall be read eight days prior to the congregational meeting at the worship services on the two preceding Lord's Days.
- c. If the congregation has no public meeting, ten days' notice by mail or phone to all members who can be reached shall be sufficient.

4. *Order of Meeting*

The order of the meeting shall be as follows:

- a. The session shall be constituted by the moderator or presbytery's appointee, and the privileges of the floor shall be extended to all elders of

the denomination present.

- b. A quorum of one-half of the active resident communicant membership shall be confirmed.
- c. The edict shall be read for the final time.
- d. Worship, with a sermon, shall be conducted under the direction of the session.
- e. An appointed elder shall narrate the previous steps leading up to the ordination and/or installation.
- f. An appointed elder shall ask the appropriate Queries for Ordination of the candidates and elicit an affirmative response.
- g. Candidates shall publicly sign the Queries for Ordination.
- h. In the case of ordination and installation the candidate shall kneel for prayer and all elders present shall be invited to join in the laying on of hands.
- i. In the case of installation only an installation prayer shall be offered.
- j. An elder shall offer the prayer of ordination and/or installation in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ.
- k. The elders shall extend the right hand of fellowship receiving the newly installed elder(s).
- l. Special charges to the newly installed elder(s) and to the congregation should be given at the discretion of the session.
- m. The session shall adjourn and close the meeting with prayer and the benediction.
- n. Opportunity shall be given to the congregation and friends to greet the newly installed elder(s).

5. *Cessation of Service on a Session*

A ruling elder's service may cease under the following circumstances:

- a. An elder may request the session to accept his resignation from sessional responsibilities within the congregation. Conferring the title of 'emeritus' in cases of long, faithful service should be considered.
- b. An elder whose resignation has been accepted must be re-elected in order to serve again in that office.
- c. An elder no longer serving regularly on the session to which he was installed for reasons of distance, health, or other justifiable reasons may be relieved of his duties; his session shall move with care to relieve him of the official exercise of his office and declare his status to be inactive (i.e. non-voting). In cases of suspension, see *Book of Discipline*.
- d. An elder or his session may arrange for a sabbatical leave of absence, normally up to one year, during which time he shall be on inactive status.
- e. A congregation may arrange for rotation of elders, subject to the approval of its session and presbytery.
- f. An elder granted an inactive status may be reinstated to active service at the discretion of the session.
- g. An elder ceases to serve on a session when he has moved his communicant membership into the jurisdiction of another session.

6. *Removal from Office*

A ruling elder may be removed from office. The following principles shall apply to this procedure:

- a. An elder can be divested of his ordination only by deposition at the hands of his session or presbytery.
- b. The session shall notify the presbytery whenever it intends to initiate deposition procedures by forwarding a copy of the charges.
- c. In extraordinary cases the presbytery may also originate jurisdiction if it concludes that a particular session has been unable to exercise proper discipline over the elder in question.
- d. No elder shall be suspended or deposed except after a fair trial.
- e. Procedure for judicial process is set forth in the *Book of Discipline*.

7. *Cessation of Ordination*

The continuing privileges and responsibilities of ordination would cease if:

- a. An elder is deposed from his ordination by judicial action of a church court.
- b. An elder's request that his ordination be terminated is granted by a church court after careful consideration.

II. ELDERS: TEACHING ELDERS

The official proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments in the congregation shall be entrusted in ordinary circumstances to the one who has been trained to exercise his teaching gifts. Those displaying the gift for the teaching ministry shall be encouraged to undertake sufficient academic preparation and present themselves for public examination by presbytery in order to devote themselves to live in obedience to Christ and His Word in full-time ministerial service with all the privileges and duties this involves.

The elder who publicly teaches exercises a broader responsibility but has no higher authority than any other elder. While all the elders have pastoral responsibilities, common practice warrants the use of the title "pastor" for those who are called as teaching elders of congregations. Congregations whose size and/or work require additional teaching elders (associate pastors) will follow the same procedure.

In the case of the departure of a pastor from a congregation having more than one pastor, there is no requirement for an existing associate pastor to receive a new call in order for his role to be changed. Presbytery has already established him as a teaching elder in the congregation. For the sake of clarity and peace, a two-thirds majority vote of the congregation is required for any existing pastor of the congregation to assume the role of the departing pastor. There is then no need to declare the pulpit vacant. It is prudent that the Session carefully lead a congregation in these matters for unity's sake.

All teaching elders serving whose active duty is in the Armed Forces of Canada or the United States Chaplain Corps and who have been approved by presbytery shall be considered as missionaries employed by their presbyteries

and on loan to the Armed Forces of Canada or of the United States, and their presbyteries shall have oversight and require reports of their activities. (See *1985 Minutes of Synod*, page 91).

A. Qualifications

Along with those qualifications specified in Section I.A., those eligible to be called as teaching elders must display the Spirit's call and gifts to study diligently and proclaim publicly the Word of God (1 Timothy 5:17).

B. Duties

Along with duties specified in Section I.B., the duties of a teaching elder include:

1. Proclaiming God's Word in worship.
2. Administering the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
3. Conducting wedding and funeral services.

Retired teaching elders are most welcome, but are not required, to participate regularly in the church's higher courts; their absence does not require a formal excuse request.

C. Preparation

1. *Initial Steps*

To become a teaching elder the following steps must be taken:

- a. He must present himself to his session as one desiring to prepare himself to become a teaching elder.
- b. If the session supports his intentions they shall request presbytery to take him under care.
- c. In ordinary cases he shall complete a bachelor's degree or its equivalent before undertaking specific theological education.
- d. Upon completion of his collegiate degree or its equivalent and his reception by presbytery as a student of theology, he shall be expected to complete the course of seminary instruction required by his presbytery leading to a Master of Divinity or its equivalent.
- e. Under ordinary circumstances he shall be expected to attend at least one full year in a Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary.
- f. At the end of his first year he shall give evidence to his presbytery that he will continue training to become a teaching elder. (A sermon may be requested of him by his presbytery at this point.)
- g. After favorable evaluation of the evidence presented by the student under care and reception of a favorable report from the seminary, he shall be certified by presbytery to further his seminary training.

- h. The student may be invited to preach only under the direct supervision of a session until he is certified as being eligible to preach.
- i. Licensure by presbytery shall consist of two steps: Eligibility to Preach and Eligibility for a Call.

2. *Eligibility to Preach (First Step for Licensure)*

To become eligible to preach a student shall follow this procedure:

- a. A student shall become eligible for certification to preach any time after his first year.
- b. The student shall request the seminary to forward to his presbytery an evaluation of his qualifications for ministry and statement of his academic standing.
- c. The candidate shall be examined by his presbytery in constituted court in the following areas:
 - (1) Personal godliness
 - (2) Bible Knowledge
 - (3) Systematic Theology and Distinctive Principles
 - (4) The preaching of an expository sermon
 - (5) The presentation of a paper on church history (Presbytery is responsible to make these assignments which may correspond to assignments fulfilled in seminary.)
- d. Following each area of examination, delegates may make comments and/or state reasons when appropriate for the way he will vote. Comments are to be considered individual reflections or judgments, not the settled conclusions of the court. A roll call vote should be taken.
- e. If the discourse and examinations are sustained by a two-thirds vote, an appointed elder shall ask the appropriate Queries for Certification to Preach.
- f. Presbytery should vote by roll call when deemed appropriate whether to certify him a Candidate to Preach.
- g. If the candidate is approved by a two-thirds vote he shall sign the appropriate Queries for Certification.
- h. An appointed elder shall offer prayer officially certifying the candidate in the name of Christ, the King and Head of the Church.
- i. An appointed elder shall address the candidate with words of counsel as to his duties and the limitations which are as follows:
 - (1) He may not administer the sacraments.
 - (2) He may not perform marriages.
 - (3) He may not pronounce the benediction.
- j. Presbytery shall adjourn the meeting with prayer and benediction.
- k. The candidate shall be given a certificate of eligibility to preach.
- l. He remains under the care of his presbytery and the jurisdiction of his session.
- m. Certification ordinarily shall be for a term of five years and may be renewed at the discretion of presbytery.

3. *Eligibility for a Call (Final Step for Licensure)*

To become eligible for a call a student shall follow this procedure:

- a. A student shall be eligible for certification to receive a call at the end of his second year.
- b. The student shall request of the seminary to forward to his presbytery an evaluation of his qualifications for ministry and a statement of his academic standing.
- c. The candidate shall be examined by his presbytery in constituted session in the following areas:
 - (1) Evidence of pastoral and evangelistic gifts
 - (2) Systematic Theology and Distinctive Principles
 - (3) Church History
 - (4) The preaching of an expository sermon on an assigned topic
 - (5) The presentation of an exegesis paper (Presbytery is responsible to make these assignments which may correspond to assignments fulfilled in seminary.)
- d. Following each area of examination, delegates may make comments and/or state reasons when appropriate for the way he will vote. Comments are to be considered individual reflections or judgments, not the settled conclusions of the court. A roll call vote should be taken.
- e. If the discourse and examinations are sustained by a two-thirds vote, an appointed elder shall ask the appropriate Queries for Certification to Receive a Call.
- f. Presbytery should vote by roll call when deemed appropriate whether to certify him a Candidate to Receive a Call. This certification must be made by a two-thirds vote.
- g. If the candidate is approved by a two-thirds vote he shall sign the appropriate queries.
- h. An appointed elder shall offer prayer officially certifying the candidate as being eligible for a call in the name of Christ, the King and Head of the Church.
- i. An appointed elder shall address the candidate with words of counsel as to his duties and the limitations which are as follows:
 - (1) He may not administer the sacraments.
 - (2) He may not perform marriages.
 - (3) He may not pronounce the benediction.
- j. Presbytery shall adjourn the meeting with prayer and benediction.
- k. The candidate shall be given a Certificate of Licensure.
- l. He remains under the care of his presbytery and the jurisdiction of his session.
- m. Certification ordinarily shall be for a term of five years and may be renewed at the discretion of presbytery.

D. Procedure for Election

1. Authorization

The election of a teaching elder may be authorized as follows:

- a. The initiative for an election of a teaching elder must include one or more of the following:

- (1) An appeal from the congregation through the session to hold an election or an appeal directly from the session to presbytery.
 - (2) A directive by presbytery for a session to hold an election under extraordinary circumstances.
- b. An election for a teaching elder is to be conducted by the session at a specially called meeting of the congregation.

2. *Calling a Meeting*

The procedure to call a meeting will be:

- a. The session shall issue an edict setting the date, time and place for an election.
- b. Eight days' notice of the meeting shall be given publicly to the congregation, including announcement at the worship services on the two preceding Lord's Days.
- c. If the congregation has no public meetings, ten days' notice by mail or phone to all members who can be reached shall be sufficient.

3. *Order of Meeting*

The order of the meeting shall be as follows:

- a. The session shall have a complete list of all communicant members of the congregation in good standing from which a quorum is to be determined (one-half of the active resident members). A quorum is necessary for each ballot.
- b. The final reading of the edict.
- c. Worship, with a suitable discourse, shall be conducted under the direction of the session.
- d. The session shall be constituted by the moderator or presbytery's appointee.
- e. An election shall be conducted.
- f. The court shall be adjourned with prayer.

4. *Balloting*

The election shall be conducted as follows:

- a. Candidates shall ordinarily consist of teaching elders in good standing in the Reformed Presbyterian Church and those certified as eligible for a call (Licentiates) in the denomination.
- b. Teaching elders who are members in good standing in denominations with whom we have fraternal relations who have expressed commitment to the position of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and who have been examined by a presbytery in the denomination may be candidates for a call.
- c. Any ruling elder in good standing in the denomination may be considered a candidate when he demonstrates to his presbytery the educational background and experience necessary to be a teaching elder. (See IIC2c and 3c.)
- d. Nominations may be offered by the session and/or a communicant member of the congregation present.
- e. The election may also proceed without nominations.

- f. Even when nominations have been made, votes may be cast for any qualified candidate.
- g. Voting shall be by ballot with the session taking due precaution to ensure the integrity of the vote.
- h. Members unable to attend the meeting may send their votes in writing (also known as absentee votes), enclosed in sealed envelopes which bear their names and are addressed to the session. Absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot.
- i. The use of a nominating ballot is not encouraged; if it is used, absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot. Absentee votes will not be used on a nominating ballot.
- j. Only a candidate receiving at least two-thirds of the votes cast shall be elected. Blank ballots shall not be counted in determining the total number of votes cast. A ballot marked "No," indicating that the person desires not to vote for any candidate, should be counted in determining the total number of votes cast.
- k. If a two-thirds majority vote has not been reached after three ballots, the moderator, in consultation with the session, may postpone the election.
- l. Two tellers shall be appointed by the moderator to collect the ballots and tabulate the results of the election and report to the moderator.
- m. The moderator shall declare the results of the election.
- n. An appointed elder shall present the terms of the call (which shall include the financial agreement presented by the board of deacons) for the approval of the congregation. (The session and deacon board shall have previously prepared the terms of the call.)
- o. Opportunity shall be given the communicant members and adherents of the congregation to sign the call. The moderator shall explain that signing the call indicates one's willingness to support and work with the teaching elder-elect whether the member voted for him or not.

5. Disposition of a Call

The call shall be handled in the following manner:

- a. The moderator shall immediately notify the teaching elder-elect informing him concerning the vote tallies and all other pertinent information that may assist him in reaching a decision.
- b. The call shall remain in the hands of the session for a period of time up to and including two Lord's Days so that other communicant members and adherents may sign the call.
- c. Any communicant member or adherent may request the clerk of the session to add his name to the call, in which case the clerk shall append his own initials to the signature.
- d. A copy of the call shall be sent to the teaching elder-elect.
- e. The call shall be forwarded to the presbytery along with a communicant membership roll and the minutes of the meeting.

6. Processing a Call

A call shall be processed in the following manner:

- a. Presbytery, after receiving a call, shall determine whether the call was made in accordance with the law and order of the church.
- b. Presbytery shall sustain it as a regular call and forward it to the teaching elder-elect within the presbytery or the presbytery holding the credentials of the teaching elder-elect.
- c. Presbytery may decline to forward the call for any of the following reasons:
 - (1) The refusal of a considerable minority to sign the call.
 - (2) Failure to make suitable financial arrangements.
 - (3) A conviction on the presbytery's part that establishing the relationship would not be wise.
- d. If presbytery does not sustain a call, reasons shall be recorded in the minutes, the candidate shall be notified, the call returned to the congregation and a copy of the minutes stating the reason(s) shall go to both the candidate and the congregation.
- e. If a call is addressed to a teaching elder of a congregation within the presbytery, the interest of that congregation shall be considered carefully.
- f. A presbytery which is in session may present a call immediately to a teaching elder whose credentials are held by the presbytery or to a student under its care, if the person is present.
- g. The teaching elder-elect may either accept or decline the call or ask for more time to consider it.
- h. If the call is rejected, the teaching elder-elect shall notify the congregation and the presbytery in writing.
- i. If the call is accepted, presbytery shall take steps toward ordination and/or installation.
- j. If the teaching elder-elect is not present, presbytery shall forward the call to him.
- k. Upon reception of the call from his presbytery, the teaching elder-elect shall inform the congregation and the presbytery of his decision within two weeks.
- l. A call may not be presented by a presbytery other than the one having oversight of the one called.
- m. When the person called is from a congregation within another presbytery, the presbytery of the congregation making the call, having approved it, shall forward it to the other presbytery for evaluation and presentation.
- n. If the call is accepted the credentials of the person called shall be transferred to the presbytery of the congregation making the call.
- o. That presbytery shall take necessary steps toward ordination and/or installation.

E. Procedures for Examination, Ordination and Installation

The examination, ordination and installation of a teaching elder belongs to the presbytery alone. Presbytery shall hold the credentials which shall include as complete a record as possible of his education, certification to preach, eligibil-

ity to receive a call, ordination and installation(s). Ordination should be with a view to, and in connection with, installation into a pastoral relationship. A board may request permission from Synod for the presbytery to ordain a man to minister in a special field.

1. Authorization

Presbytery shall authorize the ordination and/or installation as follows:

- a. Presbytery, or a commission of presbytery, shall arrange for the examination, ordination and/or installation of a teaching elder-elect at the earliest convenience of the parties involved. (Any objections by concerned parties shall be presented in writing to the Ad Interim Commission prior to the called meeting. If objections are raised, the Commission shall deal with them before proceeding.)
- b. The commission or presbytery, in consultation with the session, shall set the time, date and place for the examination, ordination and/or installation.

2. Calling of Meetings

- a. The commission or presbytery shall issue an edict and direct that it be read to the congregation on the two preceding Lord's Days.
- b. If the congregation has no public meeting, ten days' notice by mail or phone to all members who can be reached shall be sufficient.
- c. The date of ordination and/or installation is subject to the sustaining of his examination by presbytery.

3. Meeting for Examination

The examination of a teaching elder-elect entering his first pastorate within the Reformed Presbyterian Church shall proceed as follows:

- a. At the appointed time, presbytery shall be constituted with prayer by an elder.
- b. The candidate shall be examined in the following:
 - (1) A sermon preached on an assigned portion of Scripture
 - (2) Personal godliness
 - (3) Soundness in the faith and commitment to the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*
- c. Following each area of examination, a vote to sustain or not sustain will be taken. Each member of the court may state his reasons for his vote or make appropriate comments. Such comments are to be considered individual reflections or judgements, not the settled conclusions of the court. A roll call should be taken by Presbytery. If the examination is sustained by a two-thirds vote, presbytery may then adjourn to meet at a later time for the ordination and installation service or may elect to proceed immediately.

4. Meeting for Ordination/Installation

The order of this meeting shall be as follows:

- a. If presbytery adjourned following the examination meeting, the service

of ordination and installation should begin with the constitution of the court.

b. The steps taken up to this point shall be narrated.

c. The edict shall be read for the last time.

d. Recognizing that the examination of the candidate has already been sustained, the congregation shall be asked to indicate their adherence to the call by a rising vote.

e. The candidate shall be asked to indicate his adherence to his acceptance of the call.

f. The candidate shall come forward and answer the prescribed Queries for Ordination.

g. Having given his assent to the queries, he shall sign them.

h. A sermon shall be preached by an appointed elder.

i. The candidate to be ordained shall kneel and the members of presbytery shall lay their hands upon his head as the formal words of ordination are uttered in prayer. In case of installation, only a prayer of installation shall be offered.

j. A suggested formula of ordination for use in prayer is as follows: "... bless your servant (naming him) as we do now set him apart as a minister of the Gospel in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, and install him as teaching elder of (name) congregation...."

k. The clerk of presbytery is now responsible to hold his credentials.

l. His membership is transferred to the congregation where he is installed.

m. Special charges to the newly installed teaching elder and congregation may be given at the discretion of the presbytery.

n. Presbytery shall be adjourned with prayer, and the new teaching elder shall pronounce the benediction.

o. Members of presbytery and others present shall be given opportunity to extend the right hand of fellowship to the newly installed pastor and his family.

p. The installation of a previously ordained elder is the same as outlined above except the particular steps which refer only to ordination.

q. A teaching elder ordained in another true branch of the visible church may be received into the Reformed Presbyterian Church when he has met our denomination's conditions for a teaching elder. He shall be examined by the presbytery or a commission. A member of the presbytery shall lead in prayer on his behalf, and he shall sign the Queries for Ordination. Members of the presbytery shall be given the opportunity to extend the right hand of fellowship.

5. *Cessation of Service*

A teaching elder's service may cease under the following circumstances:

a. A teaching elder may request the presbytery to release him from his relationship with the congregation.

- b. Any teaching elder desiring to resign shall give notice of his intention to the congregation at least two weeks before offering his resignation to the presbytery. If the congregation objects to this action, their objections should be considered by presbytery.
- c. Presbytery shall set the date upon which the pastoral relationship shall be dissolved and shall with prayer effect the dissolution.
- d. Presbytery shall inform the clerk of session by letter that the pulpit has been declared vacant. This letter shall be read to the congregation. The letter shall also contain presbytery's authorization and counsel regarding pulpit supply, administration of sacraments and moderating a call.
- e. If the resignation of the teaching elder leaves the session with only one congregationally elected member, presbytery, to maintain the organization of the congregation, shall appoint at least one provisional elder.
- f. When because of special circumstances such as health, age, et cetera, a teaching elder is no longer able to exercise regularly his pastoral duties, his presbytery may with care relieve him of the official duties of his office and declare his status to be inactive.
- g. A retired teaching elder maintains the privileges of his office. If presbytery decides that a teaching elder's situation and/or vocation are inconsistent with the calling of a minister of the Gospel, the presbytery may, after a period of five consecutive years, declare his status to be inactive.
- h. A teaching elder who has moved into the jurisdiction of another presbytery shall have his credentials transferred to that presbytery and his communicant membership changed to the local congregation.
- i. A teaching elder desiring affiliation with another denomination may upon application be given credentials by his presbytery and a letter of standing by his session. If there are charges pending, they shall be included.
- j. A teaching elder who leaves the denomination without a regular dismissal is not considered to be in regular standing. It is the responsibility of the presbytery to notify the receiving body of this fact and to seek to clear any possible conflict between the two bodies.
- k. A congregation desiring a change in the pastoral relationship may make official request to the session through:
 - (1) A committee authorized by the congregation.
 - (2) A petition signed by a majority of the congregation's members.
- l. If the session refuses the above request, the congregation may petition presbytery directly.

6. *Removal from Office*

A teaching elder may be removed from office. The following principles apply to this procedure:

- a. A teaching elder can be divested of his ordination by deposition at the hands of the presbytery.
- b. A session may petition the presbytery to dissolve the relationship between a particular teaching elder and the congregation; yet the presbytery holds original jurisdiction regarding the deposition of a teaching elder from his ordination.

- c. In extraordinary cases the presbytery may also initiate jurisdiction if it concludes that a particular session has been unable to exercise proper discipline over the teaching elder in question.
- d. Procedure for judicial process is set forth in the *Book of Discipline*.
- e. Presbytery shall set the date upon which the pastoral relationship shall be dissolved and shall with prayer effect the dissolution.
- f. Presbytery shall inform the clerk of session by letter that the pulpit has been declared vacant. This letter shall be read to the congregation. The letter shall also contain presbytery's authorization and counsel regarding pulpit supply, administration of sacraments and moderating a call.
- g. If the removal of the teaching elder leaves the session with only one congregationally elected member, presbytery, to maintain the organization of the congregation, shall appoint at least one provisional elder.
- h. If a teaching elder undergoing judicial process leaves the denomination, ordinarily charges against him should be tried.
- i. A teaching elder forfeits his ordination by renouncing his faith, or may do so by conduct unbecoming a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. (Such actions warrant judicial process.)

7. *Cessation of Ordination*

The continuing privileges and responsibilities of ordination would cease if:

- a. A teaching elder is deposed from his ordination by judicial action of a church court.
- b. A teaching elder's request that his ordination be terminated is granted by a church court after careful consideration.

III. DEACONS

The Diaconate is a spiritual office responsible for the ministry of mercy and stewardship of the congregation. It is neither a ruling nor a teaching office. Its exercise, like the whole life of the church, is under the oversight of the session and its function is administrative.

A. Qualifications

Those eligible to be called as deacons must:

1. Be communicant members in good standing of the Reformed Presbyterian Church.
2. Evidence the standards of character and conduct consistent with those set forth in Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and 1 Corinthians 12:28.
3. Be knowledgeable in and committed to the subordinate doctrinal standards of the denomination as being consistent with Scriptures.

B. Duties

The duties of deacons include:

1. Regular attendance and participation in the meetings of the deacon board.
2. Meeting jointly with the session periodically for prayer, evaluation and growth in their respective ministries.
3. Maintaining an active ministry of mercy, such as:
 - a. Leading the congregation in discerning and ministering to needs such as:
 - (1) local needs of individuals and institutions,
 - (2) national and international needs.
 - b. Gathering and distribution of funds.
 - c. Training the congregation in the use of the members' gifts in the ministry of mercy.
 - d. Helping the congregation evaluate requests for funds by organizations outside the denomination.
4. Maintaining an active ministry of stewardship, such as:
 - a. Overseeing the work of the treasurer.
 - b. Appointing a finance committee as needed.
 - c. Keeping the congregation informed at least quarterly of financial needs.
 - d. Securing an annual audit of all the congregation's accounts.
 - e. Preparing an annual budget in conjunction with the session.
 - f. Offering family budget counseling.
 - g. Teaching principles of giving.
 - h. Overseeing the maintenance of property.
5. Developing these ministries by personal visitation.
6. Performing other duties assigned to them by the session, congregation or presbytery.

C. Privileges

The board of deacons has no legislative or judicial powers; its work is wholly administrative, subject to the direction of the session and sensitive to the counsel of the congregation.

The regular privileges of deacons include:

1. Serving as permanent members of the board of deacons to which they are elected.

2. Serving as consultative members in higher courts of the church when appointed.

D. Procedure for Election

1. *Authorization*

An election of deacons may be authorized as follows:

- a. The initiative for an election of deacons must include one or more of the following:
 - (1) A request from the deacon board that an increase of its membership is needed.
 - (2) A judgment of the session that there are qualified persons in the congregation, and an increase in the number of deacons is necessary.
 - (3) An appeal from the congregation to the session to increase the number of deacons.
- b. An election of deacons is to be conducted by the session at a specially called meeting of the congregation.

2. *Calling a Meeting*

The procedure to call a meeting will be:

- a. The session shall issue an edict setting the date, time and place for an election.
- b. Eight days' notice of the meeting shall be given publicly to the congregation by reading of the edict at the worship services on the two preceding Lord's Days.
- c. If the congregation has no public meeting, ten days' notice by mail or phone to all members who can be reached shall be sufficient.

3. *Order of Meeting*

- a. The congregation having been called together for the election, the session shall be constituted by the moderator or presbytery's appointee.
- b. The session shall have a complete list of all communicant members of the congregation in good standing from which a quorum is to be determined (one-half of the active communicant resident members). A quorum is necessary for each ballot.
- c. Inquiry by the moderator if the congregation still desires to proceed with the election.
- d. The final reading of the edict.
- e. Worship, with a sermon, shall be conducted under the direction of the session.
- f. The election shall be conducted.
- g. The court shall be adjourned with prayer.

4. *Balloting*

The election shall be conducted as follows:

- a. The session may indicate their judgment as to the number of positions to be filled by the election. Such a judgment shall be based on the needs of the congregation and the evidence of spiritual maturity of potential candidates.
- b. Session may submit a list of nominations.
- c. If the session has indicated its desire for a certain number of deacons, its list of nominees shall not contain less than that number.
- d. Nominations may also be made by a communicant member of the congregation present.
- e. The election may also proceed without nominations.
- f. Even when nominations have been made, votes may be cast for any qualified candidate.
- g. Voting shall be by ballot, with the session taking due precaution to ensure the integrity of the vote.
- h. When the number to be elected is determined, the number of names per ballot is not to exceed the announced number to be elected.
- i. Communicant members unable to attend the meeting may send their votes in writing (also known as absentee votes), enclosed in sealed envelopes which bear their names and are addressed to the session. Absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot.
- j. The use of a nominating ballot is not encouraged; if it is used, absentee votes are valid only on the first electing ballot. Absentee votes will not be used on a nominating ballot.
- k. Only those receiving at least two-thirds of the votes cast shall be declared deacons-elect. Blank ballots shall not be counted in determining the total number of votes cast. A ballot marked "No," indicating that the person desires not to vote for any candidate, should be counted in determining the total number of votes cast.
- l. If a two-thirds vote has not been reached after three ballots, the moderator, in consultation with the session, may postpone the election.
- m. Two tellers shall be appointed by the moderator to collect the ballots and tabulate the results of the election and report to the moderator.

E. Procedure for Examination, Ordination and Installation

1. *Examination*

The examination of a deacon-elect shall proceed as follows:

- a. The deacon-elect shall notify the session, preferably within two weeks, regarding his intention to accept or decline the call of the congregation.
- b. If the deacon-elect indicates his desire to accept the call, the session shall meet in constituted court to examine him with respect to his qualifications as stated above in Section I.A.
- c. The session shall examine him in his soundness in the faith and in his commitment to the *Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church*.
- d. If the session shall judge any deacon-elect unfit for the office, it shall not proceed with his ordination and/or installation.
- e. Ordination will not be required if:

- (1) A deacon-elect holds ordination in the denomination as a deacon.
 - (2) A deacon-elect is certified as having been ordained to an equivalent office in another true branch of the visible church and has met our denominational conditions to be a deacon.
- f. Public ordination and/or installation to the board of deacons will be required of all deacons-elect who have declared their desire to serve and have been examined and approved by the session.

2. Authorization

The session shall authorize the ordination and/or installation in the following manner:

- a. The session shall set the time, date and place for the ordination and installation of qualified deacons-elect. (Any objections by the congregation shall be presented to the session in writing prior to the called meeting. Session shall act on the objection prior to the called meeting.)
- b. Notice of the date, time, location, and names of the deacon(s)-elect shall be given by the installing session to all sessions within the presbytery.

3. Calling a Meeting

To call a meeting for ordination and/or installation:

- a. An edict shall be prepared by the session.
- b. The edict shall be read eight days prior to the congregational meeting at the worship services on the two preceding Lord's Days.
- c. If the congregation has no public meeting, ten days' notice by mail or phone to all members who can be reached shall be sufficient.

4. Order of Meeting

The order of the meeting shall be as follows:

- a. The session shall be constituted by the moderator or presbytery's appointee, and the privileges of the floor shall be extended to all elders of the denomination present.
- b. A quorum of one-half of the active resident communicant membership shall be confirmed.
- c. The edict shall be read for the final time.
- d. Worship, with a sermon, shall be conducted under the direction of the session.
- e. An appointed elder shall narrate the previous steps leading up to the ordination and/or installation.
- f. An appointed elder shall ask the appropriate Queries for Ordination of the candidates and elicit an affirmative response.
- g. Candidates shall publicly sign the Queries for Ordination.
- h. In the case of ordination and installation the candidate shall kneel for prayer and all elders present shall be invited to join in the laying on of hands.
- i. In the case of installation only an installation prayer shall be offered.

- j. An elder shall offer the prayer of ordination and/or installation in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ.
- k. The elders shall extend the right hand of fellowship receiving the newly installed deacon(s).
- l. Special charges to the newly installed deacon(s) and to the congregation may be given at the discretion of the session.
- m. The session shall adjourn and close the meeting with prayer and the benediction.
- n. Opportunity shall be given to the congregation and friends to greet the newly installed deacon(s).

5. *Cessation of Service on a Board of Deacons*

A deacon's service may cease under the following circumstances:

- a. A deacon may request the session to accept his resignation from the board of deacons.
- b. A deacon whose resignation has been accepted must be re-elected in order to serve again in that office.
- c. A deacon is no longer able to serve regularly on the board of deacons to which he was installed for reasons of distance, health, or other justifiable reasons; his session shall move with care to relieve him of the official exercise of his office and declare his status to be inactive (i.e. non-voting). In cases of suspension, see *Book of Discipline*.
- d. A deacon or his session may arrange for a sabbatical leave of normally up to one year, during which time he shall be on inactive status.
- e. A congregation may arrange for rotation of deacons, subject to the approval of session and presbytery.
- f. A deacon granted an inactive status may be reinstated to active service at the discretion of the session.
- g. A deacon ceases to serve on the board of deacons when he has moved his communicant membership to another congregation.
- h. A congregation may petition a session to depose a particular deacon, but the session holds original jurisdiction regarding deposition of a deacon from his ordination.

6. *Removal from Office*

A deacon may be removed from office. The following principles shall apply to this procedure:

- a. A deacon can be divested of his ordination only by deposition at the hands of his session or presbytery.
- b. The session shall notify the presbytery whenever it intends to initiate deposition procedures by forwarding a copy of the charges.
- c. In extraordinary cases the session may appeal to presbytery to assume jurisdiction in adjudicating a proposed deposition.
- d. In extraordinary cases the presbytery may also originate jurisdiction if it concludes that a particular session has been unable to exercise proper discipline over the deacon in question.

- e. No deacon shall be suspended or deposed except after a fair trial.
- f. Procedure for judicial process is set forth in the *Book of Discipline*.

7. *Cessation of Ordination*

The continuing privileges and responsibilities of ordination would cease if:

- a. A deacon is deposed from his ordination by judicial action of a church court.
- b. A deacon's request that his ordination be terminated is granted by a church court after careful consideration.

CHAPTER 4

The Session

1. The session is the court having original jurisdiction over the members of a congregation. It consists of at least two resident elders elected by the congregation. A majority of the number of elders shall constitute a quorum. Where there is but one elder the congregation becomes disorganized. Steps should be taken to increase the number by requesting the presbytery for the appointment of a provisional elder(s) leading to the election of at least one additional resident elder.
2. Ordinarily, a teaching elder is the moderator of the session. Extraordinary circumstances may arise where it is advisable for the session to elect as moderator an elder other than the teaching elder, or for the moderator to be appointed by presbytery. No elder shall moderate session in the absence of the regular moderator without the authority of the presbytery.
3. A teaching elder may be appointed by the presbytery to serve as a stated supply in the congregation. He shall be appointed to serve for a given period of time and may be asked to moderate the session. A licentiate may serve as stated supply, but shall not perform the functions of an ordained officer.
4. The moderator shall see that the session is properly constituted and adjourned in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church. He shall direct the business in accord with the law and order of the church and may vote. The session shall elect one of its members as clerk. He shall see that announcement is made of the meetings, keep accurate record of the proceedings, handle correspondence and fulfill other responsibilities as ordered by the court. He shall issue citations when required and shall furnish extracts from the minutes when ordered by the court. He shall have charge of all the papers and records belonging to the session.
5. The session shall hold meetings at stated intervals. Ordinarily, meetings and minutes of the session are open to members of the congregation except

when “executive session”* is called. Special meetings may be called by the moderator at his discretion, or upon request. The constitution and adjournment of the court shall be duly recorded in the minutes, with the names of the members in attendance. The meetings of the session shall center around prayer for wisdom in dealing with those persons under its care. No action is official unless taken at a regularly called and constituted meeting. Actions agreed upon by the members meeting informally must be ratified at a regular meeting and recorded. The minutes of all meetings must be read for correction and approval, transcribed in the record book and signed by the moderator and clerk. The record book of the session shall be presented for review by the presbytery once a year, or at such times as the presbytery may designate.

6. The session alone admits to and dismisses from the membership of the congregation. The clerk shall keep a complete and accurate record of all persons admitted to membership or suspended from or dismissed from membership, of baptisms including dates of birth of infants baptized, and of deaths. The record shall include the date of each event. He shall also keep up-to-date rolls of all those in communicant membership, of baptized members, and non-members approved to commune with the congregation.

7. A particular responsibility of the session is to care for the spiritual interest of the congregation and of each member. Therefore, it shall maintain the ordinances of public worship in accordance with the principles of the church. It shall be responsible for the leadership of the singing, for the observances of the sacraments, and for the visitation of the people of the congregation. It should exercise general supervision of Christian education, missionary societies, young people’s societies, and all other organizations and activities in the congregation. It shall guard against any inappropriate or disorderly use of the church building. It shall particularly seek to provide wholesome recreation for its young people.

8. The session is subordinate to the higher courts and shall be governed by their decisions. Each session is to insure that it will be adequately represented at respective meetings of the higher courts. It shall appoint and certify delegates to the meetings of presbytery and Synod and shall furnish certificates signed by the moderator and clerk. The elders who are delegates to any regular meeting of the superior courts shall be members of any special meeting, unless it be a meeting for the purpose of changing the time or place, in which case the delegates to the ensuing regular meeting shall serve.

9. All judicial action affecting the standing of the members of the congregation shall be initiated in the session, and the trial shall be conducted in accordance with the rules set forth in the *Book of Discipline*. All communications, appeals, complaints, and papers by members of the congregation or of the session, which are addressed to presbytery or to Synod must be brought before the session for transmission to the higher court. It shall be transmitted unless the communication deals with improper subjects or is expressed in disrespectful language. The

transmission of the paper by the session does not imply its endorsement of the views expressed.

10. A session may present a paper to presbytery on any subject to which, in its judgment, the attention of the presbytery should be called. It may refer to the presbytery any doctrinal or disciplinary difficulty with which it does not feel competent to deal. Such reference shall be accompanied by a full statement of the problem.

* Refer to *Robert's Rules of Order*.

CHAPTER 5

The Board of Deacons

1. The work of the board of deacons is a spiritual service and is administrative. The board does not have legislative or judicial powers. In the absence of deacons their ministries of mercy and stewardship are included in the responsibilities of the elders.

2. The deacons shall organize as a board, choosing a chairman and secretary from their own membership, and also a treasurer. When deemed prudent the deacon board may ask session to appoint a communicant member of the congregation to serve as the treasurer. The deacons shall meet at stated intervals and shall open and close their meetings with prayer. Adequate records of these meetings should be recorded.

3. The duties of the board of deacons include:

- a. Maintaining an active ministry of mercy. There should be a mercy fund for the relief of needy persons, both within the congregation and outside of it, whether Christian or non-Christian. The mercy fund may be supplied by voluntary gifts above the regular offering and may be kept in a separate account. Session may assign other tasks that relate to the ministry of mercy.
- b. Overseeing the finances of the congregation. This includes receiving the offerings and other income and keeping an accurate record of all contributions. It also includes the responsibility of insuring that the financial obligations of the congregation are met, and that periodic financial reports are made to the session and the congregation. Financial policies and the development of stewardship should be the responsibility of the session.

Under the direction of the session, the deacons should oversee a proposed budget for congregational approval providing for the needs and responsibilities of the congregation including an adequate salary for the pastor and other employees. The deacons should make the congregation aware of and encourage giving to other works of the church as reflected in the missions and ministries of presbytery and Synod. Once

the congregation has had the opportunity to give input into the budget and to indicate congregational approval, it is the responsibility of the session to adopt the budget.

c. The deacons should oversee the maintenance and repair of the property of the congregation.

Large financial outlay, not included in the annual budget, shall be submitted to the congregation for approval.

CHAPTER 6

The Presbytery

1. Groups of congregations are organized into presbyteries within certain geographical boundaries. Appeal for such organization may be made to the Synod by interested congregations.

2. The Synod, alone, may organize a presbytery, define its approximate boundaries, determine which congregations shall be under its oversight, and approve its name. The credentials of all teaching elders, including those who are serving as ruling elders in particular congregations, shall be held by the presbytery in which they reside. The session of each congregation within the presbytery shall send delegates to each meeting of presbytery; these would normally include a teaching elder and a ruling elder, but congregations with more than one hundred members (communicant and baptized) shall be entitled to an additional delegate. Each presbytery shall determine its policies for other certifications and for participation in the travel fund. Elders from other presbyteries and elders from other denominations with whom we have fraternal relations may be invited to be consultative members without the right to vote.

3. A presbytery shall hold regular meetings at least once a year. It shall meet within its boundaries except, by permission of Synod, during the meeting of Synod. In the latter case due notice of the meetings shall be given on the floor of Synod. The elders of the presbytery who are delegates to Synod shall be members of such meetings of the presbytery. An Ad Interim Commission may be appointed to attend to necessary business in the interval between regular meetings.

4. A presbytery may arrange special meetings. The moderator may, at his own discretion, or upon the request of two members, call a meeting to transact business requiring immediate attention. At least ten days' notice shall be given, and the call shall specify the business to be considered. The first decision after the organization of the court shall be on the question of sustaining the action of the moderator in calling the meeting. The presbytery shall consider only the business specified; other items may be introduced by a two-thirds vote.

5. If a presbytery adjourns without fixing a time or place for the next meeting, or if the presbytery fails to meet at the fixed time, it shall be the duty of the moderator, or if he is absent or disqualified, of the clerk, to call a meeting of the presbytery that it may resume its functions. Notice shall be sent through the sessions to each congregation at least ten days before the time set. If a presbytery becomes permanently disorganized, the Synod shall allocate the congregations to the presbyteries that are most convenient.

6. In order to have a quorum for the transaction of business, two conditions must be met: (1) there must be elders present from at least half of the congregations on the roll of presbytery; and (2) at least 1/4 of the elders present must be ruling elders. A smaller number may adjourn from time to time until a quorum is obtained.

7. Each presbytery shall elect from its members a moderator, a clerk and, if needed, an assistant clerk. These shall serve for one year and may be re-elected. It shall be the duty of the moderator to see that each session of the court is opened with a devotional service and constituted and adjourned with prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, King and Head of the Church. The moderator shall perform the duties commonly belonging to the presiding officer in a church court; he shall state the subject to be discussed, keep members to the questions before the court, maintain order, decide disputed points of order not matters of law and, if requested, sum up the arguments before putting the vote; he does not vote when the aye's and nay's are called for, and in other cases does vote when the aye's and nay's are equal on a question.

8. In case of the absence or disability of the moderator, the clerk shall have power to call a special meeting, if necessary. Upon convening, either in regular or special session, the court shall be constituted by the last preceding moderator, who shall preside during the organization of the court and the election of a new moderator or of a moderator *pro tem*.

9. The clerk of presbytery shall keep the minutes of the presbytery meetings, which shall be read, corrected and adopted at the close of each meeting. He shall prepare a list of items of unfinished business which should have the attention of presbytery. He shall see that the record book of the presbytery is presented at Synod for review, and shall prepare a report to each regular meeting of Synod concerning students of theology, licensures, ordinations, installations, the number of teaching elders, those without charge, congregations without teaching elders, the dissolutions of pastoral relationships, the organization, disorganization, union or division of congregations, important congregational or presbytery-wide projects and other data which indicate the conditions within the presbytery. The report must be submitted to the presbytery for adoption before it is presented to the Synod.

10. It is the duty of the presbytery to maintain a faithful supervision over all the congregations within its bounds and to provide for presbyterial visitation,

to guard against any teaching contrary to sound doctrine and any corruption of the worship of God, and to institute presbyterial discipline when necessary. The presbytery should give special care to vacant congregations, see that they are properly organized, that the sessions and boards of deacons and trustees function as they should, and that the ordinances are regularly maintained.

11. Presbyteries should make a careful survey of the territory within their bounds with a view to establishing preaching stations in needy fields which might be nurtured into congregations.

12. The presbytery shall review the sessional records of the congregations once a year and make note of anything contrary to the law and order of the church. It shall adjudicate all matters coming before it by appeal, complaint, reference or petition from the sessions, or from members of the congregations, if properly transmitted by the sessions, and shall transmit to the Synod all papers, regular in form, requiring the attention of that body. If a session refuses to transfer any paper submitted by an individual member, he may appeal to the presbytery and ask for a hearing.

13. The presbytery shall have oversight of the men preparing for the gospel ministry and shall have power to license candidates for the teaching eldership. It shall direct the moderation of calls, determine whether they are in order, and present them, if considered to be for the best interests of all concerned. The presbytery has power to ordain, install, try, remove, suspend or depose teaching elders. It shall receive the credentials of teaching elders from other presbyteries and transfer such credentials to other presbyteries. It may receive teaching elders from other denominations or dismiss teaching elders who desire to withdraw from this denomination. (See chap. 3, sect. II.)

14. The presbytery is subordinate to the Synod, is bound by its action, and is under obligation to carry out its decrees. It is the right and privilege of the presbytery to petition Synod.

15. The presbytery may facilitate its work by referring to committees various items of business for consideration and for report with recommendations. The presbytery may also transact business through commissions. A commission has the full authority of the court which appoints it in matters referred to it, subject to the review of the appointing court. The Ad Interim Commission, appointed to attend to necessary business between regular and called meetings of presbytery, may attend to the moderation, sustaining, and presentation of calls and to installations, and may arrange for ordinations; they also are to deal with other items which need the attention of the presbytery in the interim. A judicial commission may be appointed to investigate a situation or adjudicate a case which has come before the presbytery. A quorum of a commission shall consist of not less than two-thirds of its members. A commission shall report to the presbytery and submit its minutes, which shall be spread on the minutes

of the presbytery. The minutes of the commission cannot be changed by the presbytery, but the presbytery may rescind the action of the commission.

16. The presbytery, having completed its work, shall adjourn in prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, to meet at a given time and place.

CHAPTER 7

Organizing New Congregations

1. One of the New Testament patterns of the Church fulfilling the Great Commission is the work of establishing local congregations with their own local leadership. Scripture does not provide a single, uniform model of establishing new congregations. The book of Acts gives instances where new congregations are initiated by the Church through sending missionaries (Acts 13:3-4), initiated by a local request to receive missionaries (Acts 16:9), or initiated in response to other circumstances of God's providence (Acts 8:4-5). In each case, the broader Church is always involved such that the new congregations are never independent of one another (Acts 15).

2. The formal duties and responsibility of establishing new churches belong to the presbytery, which has the authority and prerogative to declare a new congregation to be organized. A new church-planting endeavor may be initiated by any number of persons petitioning the presbytery within whose boundaries they reside, or by the presbytery as it identifies needs or opportunities for a new work within its own boundaries. The ordinary progression of establishing a new congregation is from exploratory work to mission church to organized congregation, although this order is neither fixed nor required, and may not be necessary in every circumstance.

Exploratory Work

3. An exploratory work may consist of a Bible study, an evangelistic outreach, or a preaching station, without the structural organization of formal membership or locally elected leadership. A preaching station consists of a group of people who gather regularly for public worship. At this initial stage of church planting, there is greater flexibility regarding how the presbytery or a local session exercises oversight of the work. The presbytery may call one or more teaching elder(s) or licentiate(s) to serve as a church planter(s) for an exploratory work. When this is done, presbytery must take special care to ensure proper support and oversight of the church planter(s). A licentiate shall not perform the functions of an ordained officer.

The Mission Church

4. Ordinarily, an exploratory work shall be actively nurtured by the presbytery or a local session until it is of sufficient strength to be established as a mission church. The mission church differs from an organized congregation in that it has no permanent governing body of its own. Therefore, the presbytery must give careful oversight to the mission church until it is sufficiently mature to become an organized congregation.

5. Because of its transitional nature, the mission church requires a temporary organization. A temporary governing body (TGB) of elders, appointed by the presbytery, oversees the mission church. This temporary governing body has authority to examine and receive new members, to exercise church discipline, to administer the sacraments, to conduct elections for church officers, to examine officers-elect in preparation for the mission church to become an organized congregation, and to oversee the financial affairs of the mission church.

6. The establishment of a mission church requires only a decision of presbytery or its Ad Interim Commission and the appointment of a TGB.

7. The temporary governing body (TGB) may be established by presbytery in one of the following ways:

a. The presbytery may cooperate with the session of an existing congregation in arranging a parent-child relationship. The session of the parent congregation would be appointed by presbytery to serve as the TGB of the mission church. It is permissible for the appointed session to assign a subset of its members to the task of overseeing the mission church.

b. The presbytery may appoint a commission to serve as the TGB of the mission church. If there are RPCNA elders involved in the prospective mission church, they should be considered for appointment to this commission.

8. One or more teaching elder(s) or licentiate(s) may be called to serve as the church planter(s) for the mission church either by the parent congregation (see 7a) or the commission (see 7b). The ordained church planter(s) would normally become a member(s) of the TGB.

9. Members received into a mission church become communicant or baptized members of the RPCNA. Mission churches shall maintain their own rolls of communicant and baptized members in the same manner as organized congregations. However, presbytery and synod financial assessments for an organized congregation may be waived for a mission church. Mission churches and their members shall have the full rights of judicial process of the courts of the church in appeal from their governing body, and shall enjoy the same

status as organized congregations in relation to civil government. However, a TGB is not entitled to send delegates to presbytery or synod nor to vote on overtures. A church planter who is not a member of an organized congregation's session is delegated to presbytery and synod by the presbytery.

10. When the TGB has identified at least two men as potential elders in the mission church and when the TGB determines that the mission church has reached sufficient strength to begin the process of becoming an organized congregation, the TGB may conduct an election for ruling elders and one or more teaching elder(s). Deacons may also be elected. Ruling elders-elect and deacons-elect shall be examined by the TGB. If teaching elders have been elected, provision shall be made for the presbytery or its Ad Interim Commission to review and approve the terms of the call and, if necessary, make arrangements for ordination examinations of the pastor(s)-elect. If at least two elders-elect are sustained, the temporary governing body shall petition presbytery for the organization of the congregation (Form 18). Upon granting the petition, presbytery shall communicate the edict of organization (Form 19) to the TGB, which is then responsible for arranging for the organization service.

Organizing a Congregation

11. When presbytery receives a petition for organization of a congregation (Form 18), due notice shall be given and an opportunity to be heard shall be afforded to any congregation that might be affected, including those of sister denominations. If the petition is granted, the presbytery shall appoint a time and place and prepare an edict (Form 19) to proceed with the organization. If necessary, the presbytery may appoint an organizing commission.

12. At the appointed time and place, an elder shall constitute the court of the presbytery (or the organizing commission) with prayer. The steps taken to this point shall be narrated followed by a service of worship which shall include a sermon. The court shall then determine the communicant members that will make up the roll of the new congregation. Baptized children of those received shall be placed on the baptized roll of the new congregation.

13. After the roll has been determined, all the communicant members of the new congregation shall stand and give assent to the Covenant of Communicant Membership and to this additional pledge:

“Do you solemnly covenant with God and with one another that you will live together in brotherly unity as an organized congregation on the basis of the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America; that you will be obedient to the courts that are over you in the Lord; and that you will, by a godly life, seek to promote the purity, peace, and prosperity of the church as a whole?”

Members of the new congregation shall sign the Covenant of Communicant Membership. An elder shall offer prayer constituting the congregation in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church. The moderator shall then declare the congregation officially organized.

14. In the same meeting, the presbytery shall proceed to ordain and/or install those officers who have been previously elected by the mission church, and examined and sustained by the TGB, or in the case of a teaching elder, examined and sustained by the presbytery. If civil law requires trustees for the congregation, these can be appointed at this time, if not done prior to the organizational meeting. In exceptional cases, the congregation may elect its officers in this same meeting, and if appropriate, the readings of necessary edicts waived in order that those chosen may immediately be examined, ordained, and installed. All proceedings shall be recorded in the minutes of both the presbytery and the session of the new congregation.

Receiving an Existing Congregation

15. An independent congregation or a congregation from another denomination desiring to unite with the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America shall make formal application to the appropriate presbytery. Presbytery shall make full investigation of the situation of the petitioning congregation, and shall satisfy itself that the motives and procedures involved will promote the purity and peace of Christ's Church, both for the RPCNA branch and that branch from which the congregation is coming. Under normal circumstances, the presbytery should not act hastily and should adhere closely to proper ecclesiastical order. Diligent efforts ought to be made to communicate the benefits and responsibilities belonging to members and congregations in the RPCNA. The presbytery shall arrange for appropriate discussions and examinations of all the communicant members of the church on the basis of the Covenant of Communicant Membership, and the ordained officers on the basis of the vows related to their respective offices. The teaching elder of the congregation shall apply for membership in the presbytery (DCG: 3.II.D.4.b). A service of reception shall be planned and conducted by the presbytery or, if necessary, by a commission appointed by the presbytery, with due notice given to the congregations/sessions within its bounds.

16. At the appointed time and place, an elder shall constitute the court of the presbytery (or the organizing commission) with prayer. The steps taken to this point shall be narrated followed by a service of worship which shall include a sermon. The court shall then determine the communicant members that will make up the roll of the new congregation. Baptized children of those received shall be placed on the baptized roll of the new congregation.

17. After the roll has been determined, all the communicant members of the congregation being received shall stand and give assent to the Covenant of

Communicant Membership and to this additional pledge:

“Do you solemnly covenant with God and with one another that you will live together in brotherly unity as an organized congregation on the basis of the Constitution of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America; that you will be obedient to the courts that are over you in the Lord; and that you will, by a godly life, seek to promote the purity, peace, and prosperity of the church as a whole?”

Members of the newly received congregation shall sign the Covenant of Communicant Membership. The appropriate vows will then be presented to the congregation’s ordained officers for acceptance, and the vows shall be signed. A member of the presbytery will lead in a prayer of reception of the congregation in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church. The moderator shall then declare the congregation officially received by the presbytery. An address to the newly-received congregation shall be presented by a presbyter, and the court will be adjourned in prayer. The congregation’s pastor may be asked to pronounce the benediction.

18. Following a congregation’s reception, the presbytery shall give particular attention to the settling and assimilating of the new congregation into the life and fellowship of the presbytery and denomination.

CHAPTER 8

The Synod

1. The Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America is the highest court of the church, and is the bond of organic union, cooperation, and mutual helpfulness, between the presbyteries. It is responsible for the continuing reformation of the church in maintaining the subordinate standards of the church in harmony with the Scriptural truth and order. Its decisions are final, but its authority is limited by its subordinate standards. Within the subordinate standards of the church, those documents that declare confessional truth (*Westminster Confession of Faith* and *Catechisms* and the *Reformed Presbyterian Testimony*) constitute the fundamental law of the church while the documents that declare the functions of the church (*Directory for Church Government*, *Book of Discipline* and *Directory for Worship*) together with the actions of the Synod constitute the law and order of the church.

2. The session of each congregation shall send certified delegates to each meeting of Synod; these would normally include a teaching elder and a ruling elder, but where a congregation has called other teaching elders to serve on its staff they should also be certified as delegates. Congregations with more than 100 members (communicant and baptized) shall be entitled to an additional delegate. Teaching elders who are retired or who are serving the church under oversight of boards of Synod or are certified by a presby-

tery are also delegates to Synod. The clerk shall make up a roll of all of the above-mentioned elders. No member shall withdraw from the Synod before final adjournment without the consent of the court. Synod shall reimburse from its travel fund certified delegates from each congregation. All teaching elders and others required to be there for Synod's business are also eligible to participate in the travel fund.

3. The Synod shall meet at least every other year and before the adjournment of any meeting shall fix the time and place of the next meeting. If the Synod does not fix a meeting for the following year, the Synod shall appoint a five-man ad interim commission to deal with any emergencies that might require action. The commission shall be comprised of the two most recent moderators and three others nominated by the Nominating Committee, with the most recent moderator serving as chairman. Synod may itself appoint special meetings to attend to particular business. In cases of emergency, the moderator may at his own discretion, or in response to the request of a presbytery, or of twelve elders representing at least two presbyteries, call a special meeting. If for any reason the moderator is unable to act, the clerk may issue the call. At least thirty days' notice shall be given, and the purpose of the meeting specifically stated. The call of the moderator must first be sustained before Synod can proceed to the business specified, and no other business can be transacted at any special meeting except by a two-thirds vote of the court.

4. In order to have a quorum for the transaction of business, two conditions must be met: (1) there must be elders present from at least half of the congregations on the roll of Synod; and (2) at least 1/4 of the elders present must be ruling elders. A smaller number may adjourn from time to time until a quorum is obtained.

5. The regular meeting of Synod shall begin with a service of worship. The retiring moderator, or an alternate appointed at the previous meeting, shall preach the sermon. The moderator shall then constitute the court with prayer. In case of the absence or disqualification of the moderator, the court shall be constituted by the last preceding moderator. After the call of the roll by the clerk, Synod shall proceed to the election of a moderator. Any member of the court may nominate a candidate. Any member of the court may be elected moderator. The election may be by ballot, voice, show of hands, or rising, as the court may choose. The moderator-elect shall immediately assume office.

6. After election of a clerk and assistant clerk, the former clerk shall submit his report, concerning the duties assigned him by the previous Synod, and listing the errors of the published minutes. The adoption of the clerk's report shall constitute Synod's approval of the published minutes as corrected. The clerk shall make the necessary corrections in one official copy of the published minutes, certify them as correct, and place them on file in the office of the stated clerk, who is the official statistician and keeper of records for the denomination. Synod's clerk shall have previously prepared and published a docket for

the approval of Synod together with the reports of boards and committees. He shall include in the docket a list of items of unfinished business.

7. Each day's session of the meeting of Synod shall be constituted and adjourned in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the Church, either by the moderator or by a member of the court named by him.

8. It shall be the duty of the moderator to preside over all meetings of Synod during his term of office, which shall be until the next regular meeting of Synod. He shall see that the business of Synod is conducted in an orderly manner, according to the general rules governing ecclesiastical assemblies, and any special rules which Synod may have adopted. He shall appoint the regular and standing committees of Synod not otherwise provided for. Committees shall ordinarily consist of three to five elders. The person first named shall be considered chairman of the committee.

9. The clerk shall make up the roll of Synod, which shall be taken at each session of Synod. He shall keep a record of the attendance, and include it in the published minutes. The minutes of each session shall be read for correction and approval.

10. The work of the Synod shall be carried on through boards, permanent committees and commissions (see chap. 6, par. 16), which shall make a full report of their work at each meeting of Synod. Membership of these agencies shall primarily consist of ordained officers, and shall work according to the instructions of Synod. Permanent boards and committees shall be so organized that the terms of only a minor portion of their membership expire each year. In most cases, the term shall be for three years, one-third of the members being elected for each year. Except as approved by Synod as essential to continue, members of boards and committees are limited to two consecutive terms. Vacancies may be filled by the Moderator, Clerk, and Assistant Clerk.

11. A member has the right to petition any court of the church to whose jurisdiction he is subject in relation to any matter of reasonable importance. All communication from subordinate courts, or from individuals not members of the court, to be brought to the attention of Synod, such as papers, petitions, proposed overtures, appeals and complaints, must bear endorsement showing that they have been regularly transferred by the lower courts. A petition addressed to a presbytery or Synod shall first be submitted to a session, and by it transferred to the presbytery or through the presbytery to the Synod. The action of the lower court shall be recorded on the document and signed by the moderator and clerk. Such transference shall be made upon request, and does not carry approval of the petition. If the session or presbytery refuses to transmit the petition, the petitioner may protest and appeal to the next higher court. The higher court may in exceptional cases admit a petition directly from a person who is not a member of the court.

12. A lower court may petition a higher. A session petitioning Synod should have its petition transferred through the presbytery. Synod, however, may assume original jurisdiction over all matters affecting the purity and welfare of the church, and may, without complaint or appeal, investigate and adjudicate any matter requiring its attention or may direct the lower courts to deal with the matter. A complaint or appeal against the decision of a judicial commission of Synod may be made to the Synod itself.

13. Upon request of one-third of the sessions, or one-third of the presbyteries, Synod shall give consideration to an overture. Any proposal of change in the fundamental law of the church, if adopted by Synod by a two-thirds vote, shall be submitted to the sessions of the congregations. Proposed major changes in the fundamental law (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, *Westminster Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*, *Reformed Presbyterian Testimony*, Covenant of Church Membership, Queries for Ordination and Licensure, Covenant of Baptism) require that formal notice be given to the Synod one regular meeting in advance. No change shall be made in the fundamental law of the church until the proposed change has been sent down in overture and has been approved by two-thirds of all the sessions of the church (not including provisional sessions) that cast votes and a majority of the elders voting. The law and order documents (THE DIRECTORY OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT, THE BOOK OF DISCIPLINE, and THE DIRECTORY OF PUBLIC WORSHIP) may be amended by any given Synod by a two-thirds majority vote. If, however, Synod considers that the item before it should have the consideration and discussion of the sessions, it can by a simple majority vote decide to use the procedure of sending proposed amendments down in overture; however, any such amendments must be adopted by a two-thirds vote of the Synod before they can be sent down in overture to the sessions.

14. All such communications shall be directed to the Committee on the Business of Synod no less than thirty days before the meeting of the Synod. No paper shall be brought directly to Synod except those which are presented as a challenge to the recommendation of the Committee on the Business of Synod. Exception may be granted by a two-thirds vote of the Synod.

15. When an overture has been approved by Synod, Synod's clerk shall send down the overture to the voting sessions within fifteen days of the beginning of the following calendar year. Synod's clerk may utilize secure communication means and presbytery clerks for the distribution aiming to reach all session clerks and so all congregational elders. There shall be an interval of at least ten days between the local reception of the overture and the session/elder votes. In taking the vote, the Session shall record whether it favors or opposes the overture. Sessions not casting a "yes" or "no" vote shall be considered to have cast a blank ballot, which shall not be counted in the number of sessions voting. In addition, the Clerk of Session shall record the number of elders favoring and opposing the overture.

16. The voting sessions (regular and provisional) shall be those as of December 31 following the Synod at which the overture was adopted and ordered sent down to the sessions by the Synod. For the purposes of consideration in voting on an overture: (a) A provisional session exists only where there are fewer than two resident elected elders. Such sessions do not vote on overtures. However, the one individual resident elected elder may cast a vote which will be counted in the overall elder count. (b) For purposes of overtures, a session with two resident, elected elders is not a provisional session even though it has provisional elders. (c) Provisional elders (ruling or teaching) who serve on a session with two resident, elected elders and who are not active and voting on any other session, shall be allowed to cast a vote on a session they serve on, both in determining the session vote and the individual elder vote.

17. The Synod shall appoint a committee to canvass the vote and report the results. The clerks of the sessions shall report to the clerk of Synod the complete record of the vote by the time the Committee to Canvass the Vote on the Overture is appointed by the Synod at its regular meeting. The Moderator shall declare the decision. If it is found that two-thirds of the sessions (not including provisional sessions) that cast votes and a majority of the elders voting have voted in favor of adoption, the statement submitted shall be declared a part of the law of the church.

18. It is the privilege of a member of Synod to dissent from an action to which he is opposed and to have his dissent and the reasons therefor recorded in the minutes, if they are respectful and of reasonable length. He must, however, give notice of his dissent at the time the action is taken but may be allowed until the next day's session to formulate his reasons.

19. Synod shall determine the funds necessary to carry on the work of the church for the ensuing year(s), until the next regular meeting of Synod, and designate the amount to be allocated to the several boards and committees for their respective ministries. It shall also devise and recommend ways and means of raising the required amounts.

CHAPTER 9

Rules of Order for a Meeting of Synod

1. The following rules for the guidance of Synod are those commonly observed by the courts of all churches in the presbyterian system. Insofar as they are applicable they should be followed also by lower courts. It is not to be assumed that they meet every condition, for "Under extraordinary circumstances, extraordinary things may be done."

2. After the organization of Synod, the moderator shall call for the report of the Business of Synod Committee regarding papers addressed to the court (chap. 8, par. 11), together with recommendations to the Synod for action. Recommendations of the Business of Synod Committee may include the following: (1) return of the paper with reasons for the return stated, (2) immediate action by the Synod, (3) referral to a standing or special committee, commission or board for study and recommendations, or (4) consideration by the Synod at another time.

3. Reports from boards, commissions, permanent committees, committees appointed by the moderator, and committees appointed by the Synod come properly before the Synod as they are scheduled in the docket. For reports that are printed in the *Digest* it is normal procedure to read only the recommendations. These reports and recommendations are before the court for immediate discussion and adoption unless some special disposition of the matter is proposed. No motion is necessary for Synod to take action on the recommendations or the report as a whole. No substantive changes are to be made in the body of the report on the floor of Synod; if a report is to be changed substantively it is to be resubmitted to the board or committee.

4. It shall be out of order to call for persons to be heard following a report, unless for a definite and special reason which shall be stated to the court; provided, however, that a single short speech, when needed to stress the value or importance of an item of the work of the church, shall be in order without special permission of the court. The time allowed for such a speech shall not exceed five minutes, except by special permission of the court; and the assistant clerk shall give a signal one minute before the expiration of the allotted time. When the court decides that persons shall be heard following a report, the time limit for any one speech shall not exceed ten minutes, and the total time for all speeches following a single report shall not exceed thirty minutes. The speakers shall be informed by the assistant clerk as to the amount of time at their disposal before they address the court. The assistant clerk shall be provided with a signal system, which he shall ring one minute before the expiration of the time for any such speech and again at the expiration of the time. If the speaker continues after the second ringing of the bell, the moderator shall require him to desist. Courtesy to a particular speaker must not be allowed to interfere with the business of the entire Synod.

5. All other matters to be considered by the Court must be brought before the Synod by motion of a member of the court and seconded by a member of the court. Motions are to be in written form and handed to the clerk before being debated and voted upon. Special resolutions fall into this category and if signed by two or more members of the Court do not need a second. A two-thirds vote of Synod is necessary to receive a special resolution following the deadline for the introduction of papers.

6. The moderator shall at all times enforce the rule that there be no discussion of any matter until there is a motion before the house. Main motions are used

to introduce business, require a second and are debatable. Motions dealing with expenditures of money should designate the recommended source for such expenditures. Motions calling for reports should indicate whether the report is to be brought to the current meeting of Synod or to a future meeting of Synod.

7. Subsidiary motions are applied to main motions in order to dispose of them most appropriately. All require a second. They are as follows:

a. *To commit.* The object is to place the business in the hands of a smaller body for study and recommendations. A motion may be committed (or referred) to a board or existing committee or special committee. The motion to commit should designate the board or committee to whom the item is to be committed. Items involving the expenditure of money are automatically referred to the Committee on Finance. Items involving appointment or election of board or committee members are automatically committed to the Nominating Committee.

b. *To amend.* The object is to change or modify. Debate should be confined to the amendment. An amendment germane to the motion may be proposed. An amendment to an amendment may be moved, but no further complication shall be permitted. The vote shall be first on the amendment of the second degree, then on the amendment to the motion, and finally on the motion as amended.

c. *To substitute.* A motion not germane to the one being considered may be moved as a substitute. This is done by moving to lay the original motion on the table “to entertain the following substitute: ‘ _____’.” If the motion to entertain the substitute carries, the substitute becomes the question before the house, and, if it passes, the original motion is lost. If the substitute is voted down, the motion comes automatically before the Court.

d. *To divide.* If a motion contains two or more parts which involve separate principles or statements of fact, a division of the question may be called for and must be granted. Each part shall be considered and voted on as an independent motion.

e. *To lay on the table.* The object is to postpone action until a later time. Discussion is limited to the propriety of postponing. It can be amended as to time. It requires a two-thirds vote. The item can be taken up again in the same session by a majority vote.

f. *To postpone indefinitely.* The object is to kill the motion without bringing it to a vote. It is debatable and requires a two-thirds vote.

g. *To cut off debate* (to call for the “previous question”). The object is to cut off debate on the motion immediately before the court. It requires a two-thirds vote. If passed, the only qualifying motion allowable is for a record of the aye’s and nay’s. The vote should be taken immediately. (To call “Question” from the floor is not appropriate, and has no formal validity.)

h. *To withdraw.* A motion may be withdrawn by the maker with the consent of the second if it has not been debated. Otherwise consent to withdraw must be obtained from the court.

i. *To reconsider.* The object is to bring back to the floor action already

decided by the current meeting of Synod. A motion to reconsider can be made and seconded only by the members of Synod who voted with the majority on the previous action. The motion is debatable and requires a simple majority. If passed, the original motion is again open for discussion and vote.

j. *To appeal the action of the Committee on Finance.* Where the Committee on Finance recommends no action or modified action on recommendations or resolutions calling for the appropriation of money, boards and committees making the recommendations or those signing the resolution, or any two of them, shall have the right to appeal from this decision by moving and seconding the original recommendation or resolution on the floor of Synod immediately after the report of the Committee on Finance is disposed of.

8. Incidental motions which may be raised at any time are as follows:
 - a. *Point of Order.* A member of the Court may at any time break into the debate, by gaining the moderator's attention, and saying, "I rise to a point of order." The moderator will ask, "What is your point of order?" Points of order may be: debate without a motion, debate not relevant to the motion, or a serious breach of decorum on the part of the speaker. The moderator shall decide whether the speaker or his debate is out of order.
 - b. *Appeal.* Any member of the court with a second may appeal from any decision of the moderator. The moderator may stand on his decision or submit it to the parliamentarians. If the decision of the parliamentarians or of the moderator is still appealed, it shall be put before the Court in this way, "Do you sustain the decision of the moderator?"

9. Privileged motions are motions which take precedence over all other motions and are undebatable. They are as follows:
 - a. *Order of the Day.* The object is to determine the time when specific business will come before the Court. The clerk shall be alert to determine that there has not already been an order of the day established at that time.
 - b. *Adjourn.* The object is to stop business immediately. It requires a second.
 - c. *To extend the time.* The object is to continue business beyond the established time of adjournment. It requires a second. It may be amended and may be reconsidered.

10. The following motions must be decided without debate.
 - a. To adjourn.
 - b. To take up particular items of business or motions relating to the priority of business (Order of the day).
 - c. To cut off debate (for the previous question).

11. The following motions require a two-thirds vote:
 - a. To postpone indefinitely.
 - b. To lay on the table.

- c. For the previous question.
- d. To suspend the rules of order.
- e. To submit an overture.

All other motions require a simple majority.

12. A member of the court may speak only once on the following:
- a. A question of order.
 - b. Postponement for the present.
 - c. Commitment.

On all other questions a member may speak not more than twice except by permission of the court. He may speak only on the privilege. Each speech shall be no longer than ten minutes, except by permission of the court.

13. During debate the following motions only may be entertained with precedence in the order named:
- a. To fix the time to which to adjourn. This may be amended as to time.
 - b. To adjourn. This is always in order, except when a vote is being taken or when a member is speaking.
 - c. To lay on the table or to postpone.
 - d. To postpone to a certain time. This may be amended as to time.
 - e. For the previous question.
 - f. To commit. This may be amended as to the committee and the accompanying instructions.
 - g. To substitute.
 - h. To amend.

14. A member who desires to speak must rise and address the moderator, and may not proceed until the moderator announces his name. The moderator shall give the floor to the one who first addresses him. If two or more address him at the same time, the one farthest from the chair shall be recognized.

15. Every member when speaking shall address himself first to the moderator, and then speak to the house in general, but he shall not address any member individually except through the moderator. He shall treat all members with decorum and respect and shall attend closely in his speech to the business in hand under consideration. Members of the Court shall attend closely to the business in hand and shall not engage in private conversation or in anything that may cause confusion or disorder. If a speaker acts in a disorderly manner, indulges in personal reflection, uses improper language, or deviates from the subject in hand, it is the privilege of any member and the duty of the moderator to call him to order. No speaker shall be interrupted unless out of order, or that mistakes may be corrected, or because the hour has arrived for the order of the day, or for recess, or adjournment. If interrupted for the latter reason he shall be entitled to continue when consideration of the subject is resumed.

16. Before putting any debatable question to vote, the moderator shall give opportunity for debate. The moderator shall require all speakers to limit their remarks strictly to matters germane to the motion before the house at the time. Synod may set a time limit on all speakers and speeches during the debate of a specific item of business. When opinion is sharply divided, the moderator shall see that time is shared as equitably as possible between representatives of both sides of the question. When the moderator has begun taking the vote, no further debate or remarks shall be admitted, unless evidently there has been a mistake.

17. The moderator shall not engage in the discussions of the court. If he desires to exercise his rights as a member temporarily, he may ask the clerk to preside. If he leaves the chair, he shall call upon a former moderator to preside until he returns.

18. The moderator shall decide all points of order. Any member may appeal from a decision and state his reasons. The moderator may reply without leaving the chair. There shall be no further debate, and without a motion a vote shall be taken on sustaining the decision.

19. In placing a motion before the court for a vote, the moderator shall repeat the motion or have it repeated. Following the vote, the moderator shall announce whether the motion carried or not. Special provisions are as follows:

a. *Division.* If the moderator is unable to decide which way the vote went, or if any member of the court calls for a division, the vote shall be taken by a standing vote. The clerks shall count the votes, and the moderator shall announce the decision.

b. *Roll Call or Ballot Vote.* One-fourth of the members present may request a recording of the aye's and nay's or may request a vote by ballot on any question. By common consent this record may be omitted from the published minutes.

c. *Vote of the Moderator.* When the vote is by roll call or by ballot, the moderator shall vote with the other members. In no other cases shall he vote unless the court be equally divided. If he declines to vote, the motion is lost.

20. Members ought always to vote except for valid reasons. Unless excused by the court, non-voters must be considered as acquiescing with the majority. A member has no vote in the trial of a case in which he is involved.

21. The sessions of Synod shall ordinarily be open to the public, but the court may sit with closed doors on matters which, in its judgment, should not become common knowledge. It may be expedient to refer judicial cases to commissions, which shall try them according to the procedure laid down for Synod. To gain greater freedom of debate, Synod may resolve itself into a committee of the whole. When the committee rises, its chairman shall report

its conclusion to Synod, but any action of the committee to be of force must be passed by Synod.

The glory of God, the welfare of the church, and the best interests of all its members shall be the ruling motives in all the actions of the courts of the church.