

The Church Order of Remnant Reformed Church

Article 1

For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ it is necessary that there should be: offices, assemblies, supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Christian discipline; of which matters the following articles treat in due order.

Of the Offices

Article 2

The offices are of three kinds: of the ministers of the Word, of the elders, and of the deacons.

Article 3

No one, though he be a professor of theology, elder, or deacon, shall be permitted to enter upon the ministry of the Word and the sacraments without having been lawfully called thereunto. And when anyone acts contrary thereto, and after being frequently admonished does not desist, the classis shall judge whether he is to be declared a schismatic or is to be punished in some other way.

Article 4

The lawful calling of those who have not been previously in office consists:

First, in the ELECTION by the consistory and the deacons, after preceding prayers, with due observance of the regulations established by the consistory for this purpose, and of the ecclesiastical ordinance, that only those can for the first time be called to the ministry of the Word who have been declared eligible by the churches according to the rule in this matter; and furthermore with the advice of classis or of the counselor appointed for this purpose by the classis.

Secondly, in the EXAMINATION both of doctrine and life, which shall be conducted by the classis to which the call must be submitted for approval, and which shall take place in the presence of three delegates of synod from the nearest classis.

Thirdly, in the APPROBATION by the members of the calling church, when, the name of the minister having been announced for two successive Sundays, no lawful objection arises; which approbation, however, is not required in case the election takes place with the cooperation of the congregation by choosing out of a nomination previously made.

Finally, in the public ORDINATION in the presence of the congregation, which shall take place with appropriate stipulations and interrogations, admonitions and prayers, and imposition of hands by the officiating minister (and by other ministers who are present) agreeably to the form for that purpose.

Article 5

Ministers already in the ministry of the Word, who are called to another congregation, shall likewise be called in the aforesaid manner by the consistory and the deacons, with observance of the regulations made for the purpose by the consistory and of the general ecclesiastical ordinances for the eligibility of those who have served outside of Remnant Reformed Church and for the repeated calling of the same minister during the same vacancy; further, with the advice of the classis or of the counselor appointed by the classis, and with the approval of the classis or of the delegates appointed by the classis, to whom the ministers called show good ecclesiastical testimonials of doctrine and life, with the approval of the members of the calling congregation, as stated in Article 4; whereupon the minister called shall be installed with appropriate stipulations and prayers agreeably to the form for this purpose.

Article 6

No minister shall be at liberty to serve in institutions of mercy or otherwise, unless he be previously admitted in accordance with the preceding articles, and he shall, no less than others, be subject to the Church Order.

Article 7

No one shall be called to the ministry of the Word without his being stationed in a particular place, except he be sent to do church extension work.

Article 8

Persons who have not pursued the regular course of study in preparation for the ministry of the Word, and have therefore not been declared eligible according to Article 4, shall not be admitted to the ministry unless there is assurance of their exceptional gifts, godliness, humility, modesty, common sense, and discretion, as also gifts of public address. When such persons present themselves for the ministry, the classis (if the synod approve) shall first examine them, and further deal with them as it shall deem edifying, according to the general regulations of the churches.

Article 9

Preachers without fixed charge, or others who have left some sect, shall not be admitted to the ministry of the church until they have been declared eligible, after careful examination by the classis, with the approval of synod.

Article 10

A minister, once lawfully called, may not leave the congregation with which he is connected, to accept a call elsewhere, without the consent of the consistory, together with the deacons, and knowledge on the part of the classis; likewise no other church may receive him until he has presented a proper certificate of dismissal from the church and the classis where he served.

Article 11

On the other hand, the consistory, as representing the congregation, shall also be bound to provide for the proper support of its ministers, and shall not dismiss them from service without the knowledge and approbation of the classis and of the delegates of the synod.

Article 12

Inasmuch as a minister of the Word, once lawfully called as described above, is bound to the service of the church for life, he is not allowed to enter upon a secular vocation except for such weighty reasons as shall receive the approval of the classis.

Article 13

Ministers who by reason of age, sickness, or otherwise are rendered incapable of performing the duties of their office shall nevertheless retain the honor and title of a minister, and the churches which they have served shall provide honorably for them in their need (likewise for the orphans and widows of ministers) out of the common fund of the churches, according to the general ecclesiastical ordinances in this matter.

Article 14

If any minister, for the aforesaid or any other reason, is compelled to discontinue his service for a time, which shall not take place without the advice of the consistory, he shall nevertheless at all times be and remain subject to the call of the congregation.

Article 15

No one shall be permitted, neglecting the ministry of his church or being without a fixed charge, to preach indiscriminately without the consent and authority of synod or classis. Likewise, no one shall be permitted to preach or administer the sacraments in another church without the consent of the consistory of that church.

Article 16

The office of the minister is to continue in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, to dispense the sacraments, to watch over his brethren, the elders and deacons, as well as the congregation, and finally, with the elders, to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

Article 17

Among the ministers of the Word equality shall be maintained with respect to the duties of their office, and also in other matters as far as possible, according to the judgment of the consistory and, if necessary, of the classis; which equality shall also be maintained in the case of the elders and the deacons.

Article 18

The office of the professors of theology is to expound the Holy Scriptures and to vindicate sound doctrine against heresies and errors.

Article 19

The churches shall exert themselves, as far as necessary, that there may be students supported by them to be trained for the ministry of the Word.

Article 20

Students who have received permission according to the rule in this matter, and persons who have according to Article 8 been judged competent to be prepared for the ministry of the Word, shall, for their own training, and for the sake of becoming known to the congregations, be allowed to speak a word of edification in the meetings for public worship.

Article 21

The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant.

Article 22

The elders shall be chosen by the judgment of the consistory and the deacons according to the regulations for that purpose established by the consistory. In pursuance of these regulations, every church shall be at liberty, according to its circumstances, to give the members an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons, in order that the consistory may thereupon either present to the congregation for election as many elders as are needed, that they may, after they are approved by it, unless any obstacle arise, be installed with public prayers and stipulations; or present a double number

to the congregation and thereupon install the one-half chosen by it, in the aforesaid manner, agreeably to the form for this purpose.

Article 23

The office of the elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the churches, to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion.

Article 24

The deacons shall be chosen, approved, and installed in the same manner as was stated concerning the elders.

Article 25

The office peculiar to the deacons is diligently to collect alms and other contributions of charity and, after mutual counsel, faithfully and diligently to distribute the same to the poor as their needs may require it; to visit and comfort the distressed and to exercise care that the alms are not misused; of which they shall render an account in consistory, and also (if anyone desires to be present) to the congregation, at such a time as the consistory may see fit.

Article 26

In places where others are devoting themselves to the care of the poor, the deacons shall seek a mutual understanding with them, to the end that the alms may all the better be distributed among those who have the greatest need. Moreover, they shall make it possible for the poor to make use of institutions of mercy, and to that end they shall request the board of directors of such institutions to keep in close touch with them. It is also desirable that the diaconates assist and consult one another, especially in caring for the poor in such institutions.

Article 27

The elders and deacons shall serve two or more years according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The retiring officers shall be succeeded by others, unless the circumstances and the profit of any church, in the execution of Articles 22 and 24, render a reelection advisable.

Article 28

The consistory shall take care that the churches, for the possession of their property and the peace and order of their meetings, can claim the protection of the authorities; it should be well understood, however, that for the sake of peace and material possession they may never suffer the royal government of Christ over His church to be in the least infringed upon.

Of the Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Article 29

Three kinds of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be maintained: the consistory, the classis, and the general synod.

Article 30

In these assemblies ecclesiastical matters only shall be transacted and that in an ecclesiastical manner. In major assemblies only such matters shall be dealt with as could not be finished in minor assemblies, or such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common.

Article 31

If anyone complain that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the Church Order, as long as they are not changed by the general synod.

Article 32

The proceedings of all assemblies shall begin by calling upon the name of God and be closed with thanksgiving.

Article 33

Those who are delegated to the assemblies shall bring with them their credentials and instructions, signed by those sending them, and they shall have a vote in all matters except such as particularly concern their persons or churches.

Article 34

In all assemblies there shall be not only a president, but also a clerk to keep a faithful record of all important matters.

Article 35

The office of the president is to state and explain the business to be transacted, to see to it that everyone observe due order in speaking, to silence the captious and those who are vehement in speaking; and properly to discipline them if they refuse to listen. Furthermore his office shall cease when the assembly arises.

Article 36

The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the general synod has over the classis.

Article 37

In all churches there shall be a consistory composed of the ministers of the Word and the elders, who shall, as a rule, meet once a month, or more frequently as the need arises. The minister of the Word (or the ministers, if there be more than one, in turn) shall preside and regulate the proceedings. Whenever the number of the elders is small, the deacons may be added to the consistory by local regulation; this shall invariably be the rule where the number is less than three.

Article 38

In places where the consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, this shall not take place except with the advice of the classis.

Article 39

Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be placed under the care of a neighboring consistory.

Article 40

The deacons shall meet monthly, or more frequently as the need arises, to transact the business pertaining to their office, calling upon the name of God; whereunto the ministers shall take good heed, and if necessary they shall be present.

Article 41

The classical meetings shall consist of neighboring churches that respectively delegate, with proper credentials, a minister and an elder to meet at such time and place as was determined by the previous classical meeting. Such meetings shall be held at least once in three months, unless great distances render this inadvisable. In these meetings the ministers shall preside in rotation, or one shall be chosen to preside; however, the same minister shall not be chosen twice in succession.

Furthermore, the president shall, among other things, put the following questions to the delegates of each church:

1. Are the consistory meetings held in your church?
2. Is church discipline exercised?
3. Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?
4. Do you need the judgment and help of the classis for the proper government of your church?

And finally, at the second to the last meeting and, if necessary, at the last meeting before the synod, delegates shall be chosen to attend said synod.

Article 42

Where in a church there are more ministers than one, also those not delegated according to the foregoing article shall have the right to attend classis with advisory vote.

Article 43

At the close of the classical and other major assemblies, censure shall be exercised over those who in the meeting have done something worthy of punishment, or who have scorned the admonition of the minor assemblies.

Article 44

The classis shall authorize at least two of her oldest, most experienced, and most competent ministers to visit all the churches once a year and to take heed whether the minister and the consistory faithfully perform the duties of their office, adhere to sound doctrine, observe in all things the adopted order, and properly promote as much as lies in them, through word and deed, the upbuilding of the congregation, in particular of the youth, to the end that they may in time fraternally admonish those who have in anything been negligent, and may by their advice and assistance help direct all things unto the peace, upbuilding, and greatest profit of the churches. And each classis may continue these visitors in service as long as it sees fit, except where the visitors themselves request to be released for reasons of which the classis shall judge.

Article 45

It shall be the duty of the classis and the general synod to furnish the following meeting with the minutes of the preceding.

Article 46

Instructions concerning matters to be considered in major assemblies shall not be written until the decisions of previous synods touching these matters have been read, in order that what was once decided be not again proposed, unless a revision be deemed necessary.

Article 47

Every year (or if need be oftener) four or five or more neighboring classes shall meet as a particular synod, to which each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders. At the close of both the particular and the general synod, some church shall be empowered to determine, with advice of classis, the time and place of the next synod.

Article 48

Each synod shall be at liberty to solicit and hold correspondence with its neighboring synod or synods in such manner as they shall judge most conducive to general edification.

Article 49

Each synod shall delegate some to execute everything ordained by synod, both as to what pertains to the government and to the respective classes resorting under it, and likewise to supervise together or in smaller number all examinations of future ministers. And, moreover, in all other eventual difficulties they shall extend help to the classes in order that proper unity, order, and soundness of doctrine may be maintained and established. Also they shall keep proper record of all their actions to report thereof to synod, and, if it be demanded, give reasons. They shall also not be discharged from their service before and until synod itself discharges them.

Article 50

The general synod shall ordinarily meet annually. To this synod an equal number of elders and ministers out of every classis shall be delegated as determined by synod. If it becomes necessary in the opinion of at least two classes to call a special meeting of synod, the local church designated for this purpose shall determine time and place.

Article 51

The missionary work of the churches is regulated by the general synod in a mission order.

Article 52

When different languages are spoken in the churches, the necessary translations shall be made in the ecclesiastical assemblies and in the publication of recommendations, instructions, and decisions.

Of Doctrines, Sacraments, and Other Ceremonies

Article 53

The ministers of the Word of God and likewise the professors of theology (which also behooves the other professors and school teachers) shall subscribe to the three formulas of unity, namely, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordrecht, 1618–'19, and the ministers of the Word who refuse to do so shall *de facto* be suspended from their office by the consistory or classis until they shall have given a full statement, and if they obstinately persist in refusing, they shall be deposed from their office.

Article 54

Likewise the elders and deacons shall subscribe to the aforesaid formulas of unity.

Article 55

To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the ministers and elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition, as well in the ministry of the Word as in Christian teaching and family-visiting.

Article 56

The covenant of God shall be sealed unto the children of Christians by baptism, as soon as the administration thereof is feasible, in the public assembly when the Word of God is preached.

Article 57

The ministers shall do their utmost to the end that the father present his child for baptism.

Article 58

In the ceremony of baptism, both of children and of adults, the minister shall use the respective forms drawn up for the administration of this sacrament.

Article 59

Adults are through baptism incorporated into the Christian church, and are accepted as members of the church, and are therefore obliged also to partake of the Lord's Supper, which they shall promise to do at their baptism.

Article 60

The names of those baptized, together with those of the parents, and likewise the date of birth and baptism, shall be recorded.

Article 61

None shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper except those who according to the usage of the church with which they unite themselves have made a confession of the Reformed religion, besides being reputed to be of a godly walk, without which those who come from other churches shall not be admitted.

Article 62

Every church shall administer the Lord's Supper in such a manner as it shall judge most conducive to edification; provided, however, that the outward ceremonies as prescribed in God's Word be not changed, and all superstition be avoided, and that at the conclusion of the sermon and the usual prayers the form for the administration of the Lord's Supper, together with the prayer for that purpose, shall be read.

Article 63

The Lord's Supper shall be administered at least every two or three months.

Article 64

The administration of the Lord's Supper shall take place only there where there is supervision of elders, according to the ecclesiastical order, and in a public gathering of the congregation.

Article 65

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

Article 66

In time of war, pestilence, national calamities, and other great afflictions, the pressure of which is felt throughout the churches, it is fitting that the classes proclaim a day of prayer.

Article 67

The churches shall keep Sunday holy as required in the fourth commandment. Whether they shall observe any other days shall be left to the freedom of the churches.

Article 68

The ministers shall on Sunday explain briefly the sum of Christian doctrine comprehended in the Heidelberg Catechism, so that as much as possible the explanation shall be annually completed, according to the division of the catechism itself for that purpose.

Article 69

In the churches only the 150 psalms of David shall be sung.

Article 70

The consistories shall see to it that those who marry, marry in the Lord, whether it be in a private ceremony or in an official worship service. When the solemnization of marriage takes place in an official worship service, the adopted form for that purpose shall be used.

Of Censure and Ecclesiastical Admonition

Article 71

As Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by the authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censures, to reconcile the sinner with the church and his neighbor and to remove the offense out of the church of Christ.

Article 72

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

Article 73

Secret sins of which the sinner repents, after being admonished by one person in private or in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be laid before the consistory.

Article 74

If anyone, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public sin, the matter shall be reported to the consistory.

Article 75

The reconciliation of all such sins as are of their nature of a public character, or have become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place (upon sufficient evidence of repentance) in such a manner as the consistory shall deem conducive to the edification of each church. Whether in particular cases this shall take place in public shall, when there is a difference of opinion about it in the consistory, be considered with the advice of two neighboring churches or of the classis.

Article 76

Such as obstinately reject the admonition of the consistory, and likewise those who have committed a public or otherwise gross sin, shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. And if he, having been suspended, after repeated admonitions, shows no signs of repentance, the consistory shall at last proceed to the extreme remedy, namely, excommunication, agreeably to the form adopted for that purpose according to the Word of God. But no one shall be excommunicated except with advice of the classis.

Article 77

After the suspension from the Lord's table, and subsequent admonitions, and before proceeding to excommunication, the obstinacy of the sinner shall be publicly made known to the congregation; the offense explained, together with the care bestowed upon him, in reproof, suspension from the Lord's Supper, and repeated admonition; and the congregation shall be exhorted to speak to him and to pray for him. There shall be three such admonitions. In the first the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned that he be somewhat spared. In the second, with the advice of the classis, his name shall be mentioned. In the third the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repent) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the church, so that his excommunication, in case he remains obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the church. The interval between the admonitions shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

Article 78

Whenever anyone who has been excommunicated desires to become reconciled to the church in the way of repentance, it shall be announced to the congregation, either before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or at some other opportune time, in order that (in as far as no one can mention anything against him to the contrary) he may with profession of his conversion be publicly reinstated, according to the form for that purpose.

Article 79

When ministers of the divine Word, elders, or deacons have committed any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the authorities, the elders and deacons shall immediately, by preceding sentence of the consistory thereof and of the nearest Church, be suspended or expelled from their office, but the ministers shall Church Order only be suspended. Whether these shall be entirely deposed from office shall be subject to the judgment of the classis, with the advice of the delegates of the synod mentioned in Article 11.

Article 80

Furthermore, among the gross sins which are worthy of being punished with suspension or deposition from office, these are the principal ones: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre; in short, all sins and gross offenses as render the perpetrators infamous before the world, and which in any private member of the church would be considered worthy of excommunication.

Article 81

The ministers of the Word, elders, and deacons shall before the celebration of the Lord's Supper exercise Christian censure among themselves, and in a friendly spirit admonish one another with regard to the discharge of their office.

Article 82

To those who remove from the congregation, a letter or testimony concerning their profession and conduct shall be given by the consistory, signed by two; or, in the case of letters which are given under the seal of the church, signed by one.

Article 83

Furthermore, to the poor, removing for sufficient reasons, so much money for traveling shall be given by the deacons as they deem adequate. The consistory and the deacons shall, however, see to it that they be not too much inclined to relieve their churches of the poor, with whom they would without necessity burden other churches.

Article 84

No church shall in any way lord it over other churches, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons.

Article 85

Churches whose usages differ from ours merely in nonessentials shall not be rejected.

Article 86

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the church, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent that they (if the profit of the churches demand otherwise) may and ought to be altered, augmented, or diminished. However, no particular congregation or classis shall be at liberty to do so, but they shall show all diligence in observing them, until it be otherwise ordained by the general synod.