

## Report of the Commission on Church Order

The Commission on Church Order (CCO) serves a supportive role for the church, “making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the *Book of Church Order*” (*BCO*) and providing “advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the *Book of Church Order*” (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4b [2023 edition, pp. 114-115]). To faithfully fulfill these responsibilities, the commission met in person at the Michigan Regional Center in Grand Rapids on September 18-20, 2023, and March 4-5, 2024, and via Zoom on May 31, 2023; August 10, 2023; November 30, 2023; January 10, 2024; February 5, 2024; March 19, 2024; and April 11, 2024.

On several other occasions, the commission consulted with General Synod officers, General Synod Council (GSC) staff, as well as officers and members of other assemblies, agencies, commissions, and institutions—both formally and informally—responding to requests for assistance in interpreting or applying the provisions of our order. Representatives from the commission also attended in-person and virtual meetings of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) restructuring team, serving as a resource following the mandate by the General Synod (*Minutes of General Synod 2021*, RF 21-1, p. 94).

### Advisory Responses to Requests for Interpretation

The commission received several inquiries related to the interpretation or application of the *BCO*. What follows is a summary of some of the more significant advisory responses provided by the commission.

#### *Acceptance of Ministers from Another Denomination into a Classis*

The commission received an inquiry into the appropriate process for receiving a minister from another denomination into a classis, and whether a call or contract is required to be in place prior to the acceptance (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 5 [2023 edition, pp. 53-54]).

The commission agreed that the *BCO* process for the “Reception of Ministers and Licensed Candidates from Other Denominations” generally presumes that the minister affiliated with another denomination would have a current invitation to serve in a ministry within the classis (i.e., either by call or contract) or be commissioned by the classis (i.e., specialized ministry) before the minister would be received as a member of classis—commonly spoken of as “transferring her or his ordination” (see especially *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 5a-d [2023 edition, p. 54]).

Often it is the case that an RCA congregation expresses an interest in extending a call to such a minister who has already been serving the church under contract, or who has been preaching and/or providing other pastoral services at least occasionally. Without some reasonably sure prospect that the minister will receive an invitation to ministry within the classis, all the work necessary to receive an ordained minister affiliated with another denomination may be fruitless. While the order does

not expressly prohibit a classis from receiving such a minister who would be without charge, this scenario is not directly contemplated within the order because it would be unusual—and perhaps unwise. Ultimately, it is the prerogative of the classis whether to approve or refuse to approve a call or contract to a non-RCA minister, and the classis has to act as it sees fit.

Assuming the minister is not from a denomination “that the General Synod has declared to be in full communion with the RCA” (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 4 [2023 edition, p. 14]), a minister affiliated with another denomination may not receive a call from a consistory of an RCA church until the classis has preliminarily determined that the minister “is able to meet the requirements set forth in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Sections 1, 2, 3, and 4” (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 5a [2023 edition, p. 53]). If those conditions have been met, the minister may candidate with RCA congregations within the bounds of the classis. Should then a consistory so discern, it may request of the classis to approve a call to the minister, and it is at this point that the minister should be examined for admission into the classis (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 5d [2023 edition, p. 54]). Based on this principle, a similar process may be followed when a contract or specialized ministry is in view.

#### *Regional Synod Executives as Corresponding Delegates to the General Synod*

Can a regional synod executive appoint an alternative person to serve as a corresponding delegate to the General Synod if the executive is unable to attend? The commission affirmed that the provision that makes the regional synod executive a corresponding delegate to General Synod (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 11c [2023 edition, p. 124]) doesn’t include any provision that the regional synod executive may appoint an alternative person if he or she is unable to attend General Synod.

#### *Service by Non-RCA Ministers on General Synod Commissions, Agencies, and Boards*

Are ministers from other denominations serving an RCA congregation under call eligible for service on commissions, agencies, or boards of the General Synod? *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 15 (2023 edition, pp. 58-59) states that a minister of another denomination may hold membership in a classis upon request and with the approval of the classis for the period of the approved service, but “may not represent their classis in the higher judicatories, assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Reformed Church in America.” Such ministers may not serve on commissions, agencies, or boards of the General Synod because of the temporary nature of their membership in the classis and because their primary ecclesiastical membership is with the denomination that holds their ordination.

#### *Dual Affiliation of a Church Member*

Is it possible for a member whose congregation left the RCA, and who now does not live within proximity of any RCA congregation, to “remain RCA” for purposes of staying connected to the denomination and continuing to serve on denominational

boards by finding an RCA church willing to hold their membership while also keeping membership with their home church—thus “dual affiliating”? *BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 2 (2023 edition, p. 112) states that membership on a board, agency, or commission is open to all confessing members of RCA congregations. The *BCO* also assumes that a person will only be a confessing member of one congregation, which will be responsible for the care and discipline of that member. The only exception to this is in the case of a missionary holding membership in an indigenous church and their sending church.

When the classis transfers a church to another denomination, the entire membership roll of the church is transferred. In the case of the question at hand, the member has no other RCA church in close proximity to transfer to; however, there is no assumption of geographic proximity when it comes to membership. A person could become an active confessing member of an RCA church thousands of miles away, with the permission of that church’s board of elders. The member could participate in the full sacramental life of the RCA church electronically while still maintaining social and spiritual connections with the church that previously held their membership. All of this is at the discretion of the board of elders of the RCA church that would accept the member.

#### *Commission, Board, or Agency Term of a Person Whose Church Leaves the RCA*

When is a person disqualified from serving on a General Synod commission, board, or agency if the congregation of which the person is a confessing member leaves the RCA, and who is responsible for determining the disqualification? The commission understands the *BCO* to require that a person be a confessing member to be eligible, and that their eligibility terminates upon the departure of their church from the denomination.

In saying this, the commission also believes that neither the Commission on Nominations, nor any other commission or board, has the responsibility to monitor this requirement. Rather, the commission believes that this is a matter for personal accountability—a commission or board member who is no longer eligible should resign. In the case of the agencies, however, the commission believes that there should be additional scrutiny by the agency itself to ensure it is in compliance with its bylaws and the applicable law of the state in which it is organized. If an agency believes it appropriate, it could change its bylaws to alter or remove the requirement that all members of the board of that agency be confessing members. Such change must be approved by the General Synod. Under the current language, assuming that an agency’s bylaws require that a board member be a confessing member of an RCA church, that person’s eligibility would terminate immediately.

#### *Circumstances for Request for Relief of Covenant Shares*

How much latitude does or should the GSC have when considering requests for covenant shares relief? There is no constitutional basis for assessment relief; rather, it was authorized by an action of the 1991 General Synod and seems consistent with the responsibility of the GSC to “administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in

America between the sessions of the General Synod” (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 6d [2023 edition, p. 111]). The commission observed that the question presented does not involve a request for interpretation of the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO* Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 4.b.2 [2023 edition, p. 115]). Rather, it seeks guidance regarding the application of the action of the 1991 General Synod. That action has not been affected by the adoption of an assessment method that is based upon a percentage of income. Consequently, the GSC should determine whether the justifications for assessment relief that are being presented by the classis are consistent with the action of the 1991 General Synod.

## **Referrals from Previous General Synods**

### *Delegates to Classis Meetings*

The 2023 General Synod voted to adopt OG 23-1, thereby instructing the commission “to consider the revision to the *Book of Church Order* requested in Overture 1, and report back to the General Synod 2024.” Overture 1 was as follows:

The Classis of Holland respectfully overtures the General Synod to adopt the following revision to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3, Section 1b, for recommendation to the classes for approval (proposed additions are underlined):

A church without an installed minister or a commissioned pastor appointed by the classis to serve as supervisor of the consistory shall have an elder delegate who shall not be counted as one of the above delegates in subsection (a).

#### Reasons:

1. Currently, a church served by one or more commissioned pastors and no installed ministers must send two elder delegates to stated sessions of classis in addition to their commissioned pastor(s), even if a commissioned pastor has been appointed by the classis to preside at meetings of the consistory (as provided for in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 4a).
2. Commissioned pastors shall not serve as an elder delegate to classis (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 4b).
3. It can be a significant burden for one church to send three or more delegates to classis meetings, especially if the congregation does not have many members. Adopting this amendment would decrease that burden for such congregations.
4. Because such churches often find it difficult to send all their required delegates (commissioned pastors and elder delegates), their classes may struggle to meet the requirements for attendance at stated sessions laid out in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 4, Section 1: “The presence of (a) a majority of elder delegates and (b) a majority of commissioned pastors and ministers who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis is required.”

5. If such a church were able to send all their required delegates, that would result in that one congregation having more representation than other churches with one installed minister and one elder delegate.  
(MGS 2023, p. 95)

In response, the commission offers the following recommendation:

**CO 24-1**

**To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3, Section 1b for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined):**

**A church without an installed minister or a commissioned pastor appointed by the classis to serve as supervisor or presiding officer of the consistory shall have an elder delegate who shall not be counted as one of the above delegates in subsection (a).**

*Study of Policy Governance*

The 2023 General Synod voted to adopt ONB 23-4, thereby instructing the commission

to review the two systems of government at work in the RCA, namely the centralized and directed government of the General Synod Council and the widely conversational and bottom-up government of our historic polity, to include:

- Re-examining the Carver model for policy governance, its principles in comparison and contrast to those of our polity, its costs and benefits after two decades of use, its critique from outside the GSC, with attention to its restrictions on interaction with the staff and on communication in general, and its effect on the organizational health of the RCA;
- Consulting the officers and stated clerks of all the classes and regional synods, as well as other General Synod commissions;
- Investigating the governance policies of our partner denominations in full communion; and further;

To offer a report and any recommendations to the General Synod of 2025  
(MGS 2023, pp. 103-104).

The commission has been at work on this recommendation, consulting with the Commission on History, investigating the governance policies of our full communion partners, and preparing a survey to distribute to users of policy governance throughout the RCA. The commission will offer its report, along with any recommendations, to the General Synod of 2025.

## **Affiliation of Colleges with the Reformed Church in America**

On August 30, 2023, members of the commission, along with representatives from the restructuring team and RCA staff, met with the presidents of Central College, Hope College, Northwestern College, New Brunswick Theological Seminary, and Western Theological Seminary. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the nature of the relationship of the RCA and its colleges and seminaries.

In response to the Commission on Nominations' April 20, 2022, request for interpretation concerning a question from the Board of Trustees of Northwestern College about the status of General Synod-appointed board members who may no longer be members of an RCA congregation, this commission offered an advisory response. Given the attendant facts and circumstances, the commission expressed the opinion that the three required General Synod-appointed trustees for each of the colleges must be members of RCA congregations or classes. The *BCO* requires that "The governing boards of all institutions of higher learning in the United States which are officially related to the Reformed Church in America shall at all times include at least three members who are designated by the General Synod" (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 7, Section 5 [2023 edition, p. 74]).

At this meeting, the college presidents proposed a new category of relationship for the RCA colleges different from the "officially related" category that mandates RCA members serve on boards of trustees and institutional bylaws be approved by the General Synod. This new category of affiliation would allow each college to sign an agreement with the General Synod as to the nature of the affiliation and the rights and responsibilities of each partner in the agreement. This option allowing the colleges to redefine their relationship to the General Synod avoids the problems associated with the appointment of trustees and allows more flexibility in the nature of the formal relationships. In hopes of continuing the long history of relationship between the RCA and its colleges, the commission recommends the following:

### **CO 24-2**

**To adopt the following amendment to *Bylaws of the General Synod*, Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 3 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):**

#### **Sec. 3. Colleges - Officially Related or Affiliated**

- a. The presidents of the colleges officially related to the Reformed Church in America or other persons designated by the respective boards of trustees in place of the presidents shall be corresponding delegates.**
- b. Each officially related college shall appoint two students as corresponding delegates.**

**c. The presidents of the colleges affiliated with the Reformed Church in America or other persons designated by the presidents will be invited as guests to the meetings of the General Synod and may be invited to present a report.**

**d. Each affiliated college shall sign an affiliation agreement approved by the General Synod and the board of trustees of the college defining the nature of the relationship.**

### **Plan of Union Document for Union Churches**

In preparing recommendations for the 2023 General Synod, the commission began working on revisions to *BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, which addresses union churches. A union church is formed when an RCA church unites with a church from another Reformed body. Section 2 of Article 7 presents the Plan of Union that the new union church shall adopt, which is 23 points long. Historically, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) had an identical Plan of Union in its church order, but over time, the nature of union churches has changed. The Presbyterians amended their order to account for changing times, but the RCA has not up to this point. As more churches are opting to unite with churches from other Reformed bodies, this section of the *BCO* is in need of amending. The commission offers the following recommendation:

#### **CO 24-3**

**To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7 for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):**

#### ***Article 7. Union Churches***

***Sec. 1. A church may unite to form a union church with one or more churches of other reformed bodies, with the approval of the classis.***

***Sec. 2. The plan of union adopted by the union church shall follow the minimum requirements:***

**a. The plan of union shall be subject to the constitution of each denomination involved. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the congregational governing body shall petition the next higher governing bodies to resolve the conflict.**

**b. The plan of union shall be approved by a two-thirds majority of the members of each of the congregations at duly called meetings of the congregation and by the classis**

or equivalent governing body of each church. No provision of a plan of union shall be construed as modifying or amending the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.

- c. Assessments shall be paid to each classis or equivalent governing body of jurisdiction on the basis of either total confessing membership or percentage of income of the union church, equally divided among the denominations involved.

~~Sec. 2. The following Plan of Union shall be adopted by the union church so formed:~~

- ~~a. The following Plan of Union is adopted by the Reformed Church of \_\_\_\_\_, effective as of the date when each of the congregations have approved the plan by a two-thirds majority of those present at a regularly called congregational meeting with such notice and quorum as is required by the constitution of each church, and when the classis (presbytery) of jurisdiction of each church has approved the particular union and this Plan of Union.~~
- ~~b. The purpose of this union is to provide for the worship of Almighty God and instruction in the Christian religion by a united congregation which will share the property, real and personal, of the uniting churches and provide for the services of a minister or ministers for the united church.~~
- ~~c. The united church shall be known as the Church of \_\_\_\_\_.~~
- ~~d. The united church shall be subject to the constitution of each church involved as set forth in subsections r, s, u, and v.~~
- ~~e. The consistory or governing body shall submit its records annually, and whenever requested, to each assembly (judicatory) of jurisdiction.~~
- ~~f. The membership of the united church shall consist of those who were members of the uniting churches, plus those received by the consistory or governing body of the united church.~~
- ~~g. The consistory or governing body of the united church shall report an equal share of the total membership to each assembly (judicatory) and jurisdiction, and such~~

~~membership shall be published in the Acts and Proceedings (Minutes) of the general assembly, with a note to the effect that the report is that of a union church, and with an indication of the total actual membership. A similar report of church school enrollment, baptisms, etc., and financial expenditures shall be made by the consistory or governing body and noted by each general assembly in its minutes.~~

- ~~h. Initially the officers of the united church, elders and deacons, shall be those officers in active service of the united churches, who will undertake to perform their ordination responsibilities under the constitution of each church, as indicated in subsections d above and r, s, u, and v below.~~
- ~~i. At the first annual meeting subsequent to the effective date of the union, new classes of officers, to replace the officers noted in subsection h above, shall be elected by the united congregation according to the constitutional procedure in force as a consequence of subsection v below.~~
- ~~j. The pastoral relations of the ministers of the uniting churches shall be dissolved automatically by the action of the classis (presbytery) of jurisdiction in approving this plan, but they may be eligible to be ministers (pastors or associate pastors) of the united church according to the will of the united congregation and subject to the approval of the classes (both the classis and the presbytery).~~
- ~~k. The minister/s of the united church shall be full and responsible members of each assembly (judicatory) of immediate jurisdiction and shall be subject to discipline as provided below in subsection t.~~
- ~~l. The united church shall cause a corporation to be formed under the appropriate laws of the state or province where permissible. The corporation shall include in its articles or charter the substance of subsections b, c, and d above.~~
- ~~m. All property of the uniting churches, real and personal, shall be transferred to the corporation formed in subsection l above. The new corporation shall be the legal successor of the corporations, if any, of the uniting churches, and it shall be bound to administer any trust property or moneys received in accordance with the~~

~~provisions of the original establishment of the trust. All liabilities of the uniting churches shall be liabilities of the united church. In any state or province where a church corporation is forbidden, the purposes of this subsection shall be achieved in harmony with the law of that state or province.~~

- ~~n. Trustees of the corporation (or the unincorporated body) shall be elected in harmony with civil law according to the constitutional provisions outlined in subsection d above, as interpreted by subsection v below.~~
- ~~o. While recognizing the basic right of any giver to designate the cause or causes to which the gift shall go, the consistory or governing body of the united church shall annually propose to the congregation a general mission or benevolence program which shall be divided equitably among the officially approved causes of each denomination. The proportions shall be as the consistory or governing body shall decide in response to the request of the higher assemblies (judicatories).~~
- ~~p. Per capita apportionments or assessments shall be paid to each classis (presbytery) of jurisdiction on the basis of the total communicant membership of the union church, equally divided among the denominations involved.~~
- ~~q. All members of the united church shall be under the discipline of the board of elders or governing body according to rules agreed upon in harmony with the constitution of each denomination where they coincide, and in harmony with the mandatory provisions of the constitution of one denomination where the others are permissive, and at the choice of the board of elders or governing body where they may be contradictory.~~
- ~~r. Complaints against the actions of the consistory (or its equivalent) may be taken under constitutional provisions of only one denomination, according to the choice of the complainant, and once being complained to one judicatory, no other denomination shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.~~
- ~~s. Appeals from the judicial actions of the board of elders (or its equivalent) shall be made to one judicatory only (classis or its equivalent) at the choice of the member(s) filing the appeal; and all subsequent appeals shall be in the courts of~~

~~the denomination where the original appeal was filed, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on the board of elders (or its equivalent) and on the members.~~

~~t. The minister/s shall be subject to the discipline of the classes (the presbytery and the classis) provided that when either shall begin an action, it shall invite a committee from the others to join the commissioner, prosecutor, or prosecuting committee in formulating and pressing the charges. In the event of appeal the case shall be finally decided by the highest court to which the appeal is taken in the church which commenced the action, and that decision shall be equally binding on the classes (both presbytery and the classis).~~

~~u. RCA ministers serving union churches shall participate in the RCA retirement and insurance plans as required by the *Book of Church Order*.~~

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

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

~~**Sec. 3. No provision in this chapter shall be construed as modifying or amending the constitution of this church in its application to any but union churches organized under this chapter, their members, officers, or ministers.**~~

## **Restructuring Team Recommendations**

The majority of the commission's work this year was dedicated to serving as a resource to the restructuring team and assisting it with understanding the ramifications of the various recommendations it has made for the future of the RCA.

The commission may need to devote a significant amount of time next year to additional *BCO* amendments if the General Synod approves the recommendations from the Restructuring Team's report this year.

In collaboration with the restructuring team, the commission has one significant set of amendments to the *BCO* to recommend this year in alignment with the first recommendation of the restructuring team: the shift from four levels of assemblies to three, and the addition of commissions on judicial business in classes as an additional judicatory to ensure the same number of appeals as within our current judicial procedures. The report of the restructuring team provides information and rationale for these changes on pages 109-118.

*Explanatory notes for understanding and navigating CO 24-4:*

1. *Because this set of proposed amendments is long and complex, each segment of the amendment (dealing with a specific article, section, paragraph, or Formulary) is labeled with a letter in the left margin—(a), (b), (c), etc.—along with the chapter, article, and section reference when applicable and the page number in the current edition of the BCO. These letters are not part of the proposed amendments and will not appear in the amended BCO; they are a navigational aid.*
  - a. *Amendments labeled (a) through (y) are amendments to the Preamble, Chapter 1 (Government) and Formularies. Most are related to the shift from four levels of assembly to three levels, except for (g), (i), (l), and (m), which are related to the creation of new judicatories.*
  - b. *Amendments labeled (z) through (cc) are amendments to Chapter 2 (The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures) and are related to the creation of new judicatories. An additional note for this section: the superscript numbers in these amendments are part of the existing BCO text; they refer to the Explanatory Notes on Chapter 2, which are not included here but can be found on pages 99-103 of the 2023 edition of the BCO.*
  - c. *Amendments labeled (dd) through (kk) are amendments to Chapter 3 (The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order). Some of these amendments are related to the shift from four assembly levels to three, and others are related to the creation of new judicial bodies.*
2. *Also to aid in navigation, proposed deletions are both ~~stricken and in red~~, and additions are both underlined and in green. Please note that this applies only to the digital version of the report; General Synod-provided print copies will be in black and white.*
3. *At several points in this amendment, the commission has provided explanatory text, which is not part of the proposed amendment, and as such is not set in bold because it is not being voted on. These explanatory comments will appear in roman type, will not be indented, and will be enclosed in a box.*

**CO 24-4**

**To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):**

(a) *Preamble, page 1, paragraph 2 (2023 edition)*

The ~~four~~ three basic or focal governmental units in the Reformed Church in America are the consistory, the classis, ~~the regional synod~~, and the General Synod. The consistory is divided further into a board of elders and a board of deacons. The board of elders, the classis, ~~the regional synod~~, and the General Synod exercise judicial as well as legislative powers. A governmental unit exercising its judicial powers is called a judicatory, and at all other times the governmental unit is known as an assembly. Deacons exercise a legislative function only in the circle of the whole consistory. Three offices are employed in the governmental functions of the Reformed Church, namely, the Minister of Word and Sacrament (hereinafter referred to as “minister”), the elder, and the deacon. A fourth office, that of the General Synod professor, is a teacher of the church with particular responsibilities for the preparation and certification of candidates for ministry.

(b) *Preamble, page 3, paragraph 2 (2023 edition)*

Consistories, classes, and ~~synods~~ the General Synod work together in mission and ministry within their shared boundaries.

(c) *Preamble, page 4, paragraph 2 (2023 edition)*

The local churches together delegate authority to classes and ~~synods~~ the General Synod, and having done so, they also bind themselves to be subject together to these larger bodies in all matters in which the common interests of the many churches are objects of concern.

(d) *Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 1 (2023 edition, p. 14)*

...The consistory may institute and recognize such ministries that express the congregation’s faithfulness to the ministry to which Christ calls the church, provided the consistory does not infringe upon the prerogatives of other consistories, classes, and ~~synods~~ the General Synod.

(e) *Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 19 (2023 edition, p. 19)*

Sec. 19. The consistory shall make an annual statistical report ~~at the session of classis immediately preceding the stated sessions of the regional and~~ to the General Synods. The report shall comply with the requirements of the General Synod and

shall be accompanied by such comment on the spiritual state of the church as the consistory may deem proper.

**(f) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 1 (2023 edition, p. 31)**

...The classis may form such entities as may be needed for the ministry of the church, provided such bodies do not infringe upon the prerogatives of other classes, consistories, or ~~synods~~ the General Synod.

**(g) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 3 (2023 edition, p. 31)**

**Sec. 3.** The classis shall exercise original and appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of the boards of elders and consistories, both in temporal matters and in those relating to Christian discipline. The classis exercises this power either by actions of the entire body or by actions of its properly constituted judicial commission.

**(h) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 5 (2023 edition, p. 31)**

**Sec. 5.** The classis shall have the authority to transfer a local church to another classis or denomination, together with all or part of its real and personal property. The transfer of a church to another RCA classis can be approved by mutual agreement of the church and the two classes involved.

**(i) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 6, Section 6 (new) (2023 edition, p. 34)**

Sec. 6. The classis shall constitute, by election or other appointment, a commission on judicial business. All of the commission's members shall be enrolled members of the classis or elders from the churches of the classis.

**(j) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 1 (2023 edition, p. 34)**

**Sec. 1.** The classis shall annually engage its members and elder delegates in a review of the ministry of the separate congregations by addressing the following questions. The answers shall be entered in the minutes of classis for the information of the ~~synods~~ General Synod:

**(k) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 8, Section 6 (2023 edition, p. 39)**

**Sec. 6.** When an organizing church is initiated by a classis not within the classis's own geographic area, the initiating classis shall receive the permission of the classis in which it intends to

initiate its ministry. Since a classis is composed of “all the local and organizing churches within its bounds” (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 1), normally an organizing church shall become a part the classis to which it is geographically most proximate within a period of ten years from the date of its first gathering for worship. ~~However, the transfer of the congregation to the other classis happens through consultation between the two classes and the regional synod or synods affected, and the vote of approval by both classes, acting for the best interests of the new congregation.~~ However, both classes, acting in the best interest of the new congregation, may approve the transfer of the congregation at any time.

*(l) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4a (2023 edition, p. 43)*

- a. The petition for withdrawal shall be promptly referred to the executive committee, the ~~Committee~~ Commission on Judicial Business, or a special committee, as shall be determined by the classis or its executive committee.

*(m) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 4h (2023 edition, p. 45)*

- h. Any complaint by the church, or by any other aggrieved party, against the decision of the classis on a petition for leave to withdraw from the denomination, shall be ~~taken submitted to the regional synod, and any appeal from the ruling of the regional synod shall be taken to~~ the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business. ~~The decision of the General Synod, and any decision of a lower judicatory that is not appealed within the specified time for appeals, shall be final and binding upon all interested parties.~~

*(n) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 4b (2023 edition, p. 62)*

- b. The commissioned pastor shall be a member of classis during the period of commissioned service, and shall not serve as an elder delegate to the classis from a local church. A commissioned pastor may serve as an elder delegate to ~~a regional and/or~~ the General Synod.

*(o) Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 4g (2023 edition, p. 62)*

- g. Upon request of ~~the regional synod~~ the General Synod, the classis shall submit to a review of the processes used by the classis for commissioned pastor selection, preparation, commissioning, support, and supervision.

(p) *Chapter 1, Part II, Article 19 (2023 edition, p. 63)*

*Article 19. Relation to ~~Regional Synod and~~ the General Synod*

**Sec. 1.** The classis shall report annually to the ~~regional synod and~~ General Synod upon the state of religion within the bounds of the classis, and any statistics on the form prescribed by the General Synod. ~~Such statistics as the General Synod shall require from time to time shall be presented in tabular form.~~

**Sec. 2.** The classis shall report ~~annually~~ to the ~~regional synod~~ General Synod the names of persons who have been examined and licensed or ordained, all admissions and dismissions of ministers, all changes of pastoral relations, and the deaths of ministers within its bounds as soon as possible ~~since the last session of the regional synod.~~

**Sec. 3.** The classis shall appoint delegates to the ~~regional synod and~~ General Synod.

(q) *Chapter 1, Part III (2023 edition, pp. 65-68)*

*~~Article 1. Regional Synod Defined~~*

~~**Sec. 1.** The regional synod is an assembly and judicatory consisting of ministers and elders delegated by each of the classes within the bounds determined for it by the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving under the jurisdiction or with the approval of the classis.~~

~~**Sec. 2.** Each regional synod may determine the method of selection and the number of delegates from each classis within its bounds.~~

~~**Sec. 3.** The regional synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through committees.~~

~~**Sec. 4.** A regional synod may retain its designation as a particular synod for its legal documents.~~

*~~Article 2. Responsibilities of the Regional Synod~~*

~~**Sec. 1.** The regional synod shall exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the classes within its bounds.~~

~~Sec. 2. The regional synod shall exercise an appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of its several classes.~~

The amendments in Sections 3 and 4 below of Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2 that are deleted here are added to the Responsibilities of the General Synod (Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2) and the Responsibilities of the Classis (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2) in amended form.

~~Sec. 3. The regional synod shall, after consultation with the classes and consistories involved, form, combine, or disband classes. All consultations required in this section shall occur at a stated session of each consistory (BCO Chapter 1, Part I, Article 4, Section 2) or a stated or special session of each classis where a quorum that meets the requirements for a stated session of classis is present (BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 4, Section 1).~~

~~Sec. 4. The regional synod, after consultation with the classes and the consistory involved, may transfer a church from one classis to another classis within its bounds. All consultations required in this section shall occur at a stated session of each consistory (BCO Chapter 1, Part I, Article 4, Section 2) or a stated or special session of each classis where a quorum that meets the requirements for a stated session of classis is present (BCO Chapter 1, Part II, Article 4, Section 1).~~

~~Sec. 5. The regional synod shall create whatever organization it desires for the furtherance of the work of the gospel within its bounds, provided such organization does not infringe upon the prerogatives of the several classes or churches.~~

#### ~~Article 3. Delegates~~

~~Sec. 1. The delegate shall be a member of regional synod from the date of election or appointment and shall continue in that responsibility to the regional synod until the effective date of election or appointment of a successor. If, however, ministerial membership in the classis represented or confessing membership in a church within the classis represented shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the delegate shall cease to be a member of the regional synod.~~

~~Sec. 2. The elder delegate to regional synod shall be chosen from the entire body of elders in a church whether or not presently engaged as a member of the board of elders.~~

#### ~~Article 4. Sessions of Regional Synod~~

~~Sec. 1. The regional synod shall meet annually at such time and place as it may determine. All sessions of regional synod shall begin and end with prayer.~~

~~Sec. 2. The president of the regional synod shall call a special session of the synod upon receipt of a written request of one minister and one elder delegate from each of the classes within its bounds. At least three weeks' notice of the session shall be given, such notice stating the purpose of the session.~~

~~Sec. 3. The presence of a majority of the minister delegates and a majority of the elder delegates is required to constitute a quorum at any session of a regional synod.~~

#### ~~Article 5. Officers of Regional Synod~~

~~Sec. 1. A president shall be elected to preside at sessions of the regional synod. It shall be the duty of the president to state and explain the business to be transacted, to enforce the rules of order, and, in general, to maintain the decorum and dignity belonging to the church of Jesus Christ.~~

~~Sec. 2. A copy of the minutes of every session of the several classes held since the last stated session of the regional synod shall be produced for inspection at a stated session of the synod.~~

~~Sec. 3. The president of the regional synod shall prepare a synodical report on the state of religion and present it at a stated session of the synod. The basis of this report shall be the reports on the state of religion of the presidents of the several classes.~~

~~Sec. 4. The regional synod shall have a clerk whose duty shall be to keep a faithful record of all the proceedings of the body, and to furnish official notices in writing to all persons directly affected by judicial decisions of the assembly. The clerk shall also be responsible for forwarding to the denominational archives minutes of the regional synod and subsidiary corporations.~~

#### ~~Article 6. Transaction of Business~~

~~Sec. 1. The regional synod shall be guided in its transaction of business by such rules of order as it shall adopt from time to time, and which are in accord with the Government of the~~

~~Reformed Church in America. If state or provincial laws permit, the regional synod shall be incorporated.~~

~~Sec. 2. A delegate of the regional synod shall not have the right to protest against any act or decision of that body, but shall have the right to redress by appeal or complaint. A delegate shall also have the right to require that the names of all regional synod members, with their votes for or against a matter in question, shall be recorded in the minutes of the regional synod for the information of all; however, that request may be denied by a two-thirds majority of the regional synod.~~

~~Sec. 3. Only duly accredited delegates to the regional synod shall be entitled to vote.~~

~~Sec. 4. The regional synod shall constitute, by election or otherwise, a permanent committee on judicial business.~~

~~Sec. 5. Except as otherwise provided in the *Book of Church Order*, members of regional synod committees, commissions, or boards shall be confessing members of the churches in the regional synod.~~

#### ~~Article 7. Relation to the General Synod~~

~~Sec. 1. The regional synod shall report annually to the General Synod upon the state of religion within its bounds.~~

~~Sec. 2. The General Synod may assist the regional synods in the fulfillment of common tasks of mission and ministry, provided that such assistance does not infringe upon the prerogatives of the regional synods.~~

~~Sec. 3. The regional synod shall appoint a delegate to the General Synod.~~

**(r) Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1 (2023 edition, p. 69)**

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod;

~~one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods;~~ five General Synod professor delegates, drawn from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a number of missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

(s) *Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 3 (2023 edition, p. 69)*

~~Sec. 3. The General Synod shall form regional synods. It may make changes in their boundaries, and may transfer classes and churches from one regional synod to another.~~

Sec. 3. The General Synod shall, after consultation with the classes involved and upon a two-thirds majority vote, form, combine, or disband classes.

(t) *Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 2, Section 12 (new) (2023 edition, p. 70)*

Sec. 12. Each classis shall produce annually to the General Synod a copy of the minutes of every classis session held that year.

(u) *Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 4, Section 2 (2023 edition, p. 72)*

Sec. 2. The president of the General Synod shall call a special session of the synod at a place determined by the president, vice president and the general secretary of the synod upon the joint application of ~~three one~~ ministers and ~~three one~~ elders from ~~each of the regional synods at least half of the classes~~, all of them serving currently as accredited delegates to the General Synod. Three weeks' notice of the session shall be given to the members of the synod, such notice to state the purpose of the session.

(v) *Formulary 9, Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament (2023 edition, p. 142)*

*Dismissal of a Minister*

To the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS]:

From the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING CLASSIS]:

This is to certify that the Rev. [NAME OF MINISTER] is a member in good and regular standing of the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING CLASSIS], and is now requesting transfer to the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS], to whose Christian fellowship and care this minister is hereby affectionately commended.

When received by the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS], this minister's relation to this classis shall cease.

~~Last served as delegate to regional synod: [DATE]~~

...

- (w) *Formulary 13, Citation to an Accused Person or Consistory (2023 edition, p. 146)*

...

[NAME], ~~President~~ Presiding Officer

...

- (x) *Formulary 14, Citation to a Witness (2023 edition, p. 147)*

...

[NAME], ~~President~~ Presiding Officer

...

- (y) *New Formulary 19*

19. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church to Another Classis

(To transfer a church to another denomination, use Formulary No. 11.)

To the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS]:

From the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING CLASSIS]:

The [NAME OF CLASSIS] of the Reformed Church in America hereby certifies that it has duly considered the petition of [NAME AND LOCATION OF PETITIONING CHURCH] to transfer to and to affiliate with the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS].

[NAME OF TRANSFERRING CLASSIS] has duly ascertained the will of the members and consistory of that church, and after prayerful consideration it has determined that it is in the best interests of Christ's kingdom that the petition be granted. It

further certifies that the church has satisfied its financial obligations to our classis.

Therefore, the [NAME OF CLASSIS] of the Reformed Church in America does hereby dismiss the aforementioned church from its jurisdiction, subject to the provisions of the Government of the Reformed Church in America, and affectionately commends that church to the [NAME OF THE RECEIVING CLASSIS]. When received by the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS], this church's relation to this classis shall cease.

---

[NAME OF CLERK OF TRANSFERRING CLASSIS], Stated Clerk  
[DATE]

*Receipt of a Church*

To the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING CLASSIS]:  
From the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS]:

This is to certify that the [NAME OF CHURCH] was received to unite with the [NAME OF RECEIVING CLASSIS] at the session of classis convened on [DATE].

---

[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk  
[DATE]

**(z) Chapter 2, Part I (new)**

A new Part 1 to Chapter 2 is proposed below to define the nature of judicatories, the composition of these judicatories, and general procedures.

**Part I Judicatories**

**Article 1. Nature of Judicatories**

**Sec. 1. A governmental unit exercising its judicial powers is called a judicatory.**

**Sec. 2. The board of elders of each church shall function as a judicatory in all matters assigned to it as a judicatory by the Book of Church Order.**

**Sec. 3. Each classis and the General Synod shall appoint a commission on judicial business. This commission is a judicatory**

and shall execute all judicial authority granted to each respective body by the *Book of Church Order*.

Sec. 4. Decisions made by the commission on judicial business appointed by the classis may be appealed to the classis as a whole. For purposes of this appeal, the classis is considered a higher judicatory.

Sec. 5. Decisions made by a panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business may be appealed to the full Commission. For purposes of this appeal, the full Commission is considered a higher judicatory.

## Article 2. Composition of Judicatories

Sec. 1. The commission on judicial business appointed by a classis shall have at least three, but no more than nine, members and, in any event, must be less than half the number of members that constitutes a quorum for a regular session of its assembly.

Sec. 2. All members of a commission on judicial business appointed by a classis shall be an enrolled member of the classis or an elder who is a member of one of the churches of the classis. All members of the Commission on Judicial Business appointed by the General Synod shall be a member of a classis or an elder from one of the local or organizing churches of the classis.

Sec. 3. At least half of the members of any commission on judicial business shall be elders.

Sec. 4. The bylaws, rules of order, or similar governing document of the classis that authorizes the appointment of a commission on judicial business shall provide for the designation of several alternate members for the commission. The clerk of the classis shall maintain a list of the alternate members in an order established randomly. If any regular member of a commission on judicial business is unable for any reason to attend any meeting of or otherwise fulfill his or her responsibilities as a member of the commission, such regular member shall be replaced by the alternate member holding the same office whose name appears highest on the list and who is able to serve. Such replacement may be made by the action of the classis or its executive committee.

Sec. 5. The term of service for regular members of a classis commission on judicial business shall be three years. The classis

shall make reasonable efforts to stagger terms so that the number of terms expiring each year is the same. For the purposes of calculating terms of service, a partial term of two years or more shall be considered a full term. No person may serve on a commission on judicial business for a continuous time that exceeds two full terms. Any person who has served two terms shall be ineligible to serve thereafter for at least one year. If a regular member of a commission is unable to complete their term of office, then the classis shall appoint a replacement member at its next regular meeting.

Sec. 6. The clerk of the classis shall act as the clerk for its commission on judicial business, unless otherwise provided by the classis. However, the clerk shall not be a member of the commission. A classis commission on judicial business shall elect one person to act as presiding officer.

Sec. 7. When a panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business is needed, the moderator of the Commission will randomly select nine members and at least three alternates from the Commission, provided there are at least five elders and four ministers, to form a panel. If any member of a panel is unable to fulfill the member's responsibilities as a member of the panel, such member shall be replaced by an alternate member holding the same office.

Sec. 8. The moderator of the General Synod's Commission on Judicial Business shall act as the clerk and presiding officer at all judicial proceedings, unless the moderator designates another member to serve as presiding officer. The moderator shall be a member of the commission, *ex-officio* and without vote, and may attend all proceedings as an advisor to the panel.

### *Article 3. General Procedures for a Commission on Judicial Business*

Sec. 1. The presiding officer shall be empowered to render a decision on all procedural motions or requests brought before the commission. A party may appeal against the decision of the officer to the entire commission.

Sec. 2. For the commission on judicial business of the classis, the presence of at least two-thirds of the members of the commission shall constitute a quorum to conduct all proceedings and to render any final decision not otherwise the responsibility of the moderator. The affirmative vote of at least a majority of the members of the commission who are present

and participating in any proceeding shall be required to render any decision. Only commission members or their properly appointed alternates who were present for the proceeding may take part in the deliberations and cast any votes regarding the proceeding. Alternate members may attend the proceeding but may not participate in the deliberations or cast votes regarding the proceeding unless duly appointed as a replacement.

Sec. 3. For a panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business, the presence of seven panel members shall constitute a quorum to conduct all proceedings and to render any final decision not otherwise the responsibility of the moderator. The affirmative vote of at least five panel members shall be required to render any decision. Only panel members who were present for the proceeding shall take part in the deliberations regarding the proceeding. Alternate members may attend the proceeding but may not participate in the deliberations or cast votes regarding the proceeding unless duly appointed as a replacement.

Sec. 4. For the full Commission on Judicial Business of the General Synod, the presence of at least two-thirds of the members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum to conduct all proceedings and to render any final decision not otherwise the responsibility of the moderator. The affirmative vote of at least a majority of the members of the Commission shall be required to render any decision. Only Commission members who were present for the proceeding may take part in the deliberations and cast any votes regarding the proceeding.

Sec. 5. A commission on judicial business shall establish such administrative rules for hearings and trials as it deems appropriate provided that all procedures be conducted in a fair and impartial manner.

Sec. 6. All deliberations and votes of a commission shall be conducted in a closed session, provided that counsel to the judicatory, if any, and the clerk of the judicatory may be present.

Sec. 7. A commission may impose discipline on behalf of its appointing assembly. Any discipline imposed shall be appropriate for the offense and consistent with Holy Scriptures and the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 8. A commission shall record its decision, stating the reasons. Decisions of a commission shall be reported in writing

**to the assembly on behalf of which it acts at the next stated session. Official notification shall be provided to the parties within 30 days of the decision.**

**(aa) Chapter 2, Part II (formerly Chapter 2, Part I) (2023 edition, pp. 81-90)**

## **Part II Discipline**

### ***Article 1. Nature of Discipline***

**Sec. 1. Discipline is the exercise of the authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to the church to promote its purity, to benefit the offender, and to vindicate the honor of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Sec. 2. The exercise of discipline may take the form of admonition, rebuke, suspension from the privileges of membership in the church or from office, deposition from office, or excommunication, as the gravity of the offense in the opinion of the assembly or the judicatory may warrant. Admonition and rebuke are pastoral in nature and are exercised by an assembly in the ordinary course of its proceedings. All further steps of discipline—suspension, deposition, and excommunication—are judicial in nature and require the formal presentation of charges to a judicatory.<sup>1</sup> A judicatory may, in the judicial process, impose admonition or rebuke as a form of discipline.**

### ***Article 2. Nature of Offenses***

**Sec. 1. The only matters to be considered as offenses subject to accusation are those which can be shown to be such from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.<sup>2</sup>**

**Sec. 2. Offenses which are known at most to a very few persons shall be dealt with first in the manner indicated by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 18:15-17. If this procedure fails, the matter shall be presented to the body to which the offender is amenable.**

**Sec. 3. Notwithstanding Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 2, notorious and scandalous offenses require immediate suspension and/or other action as determined by the responsible body, pending review by the appropriate assembly or judicatory.**

### ***Article 3. Responsibilities for Discipline***

#### ***Sec. 1. Discipline of a Member***

All members of a local church are under its care and are subject to its government and discipline, as administered by its board of elders. The board of elders may, upon formal presentation and trying of a charge, suspend from the privileges of membership in the church a member who persistently rejects its admonitions or rebukes. If a member fails to show marks of repentance after suspension, the board of elders may, with permission of the classis, proceed to excommunication. The board of elders shall publicly notify the congregation of its intention to excommunicate, and later, after a hearing, of its final action. The board may omit such public notification, if such omission will not impair the purposes of discipline and will best serve the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Such omission shall require a two-thirds vote of the board of elders.<sup>3</sup>

#### ***Sec. 2. Discipline of an Elder or Deacon***

The board of elders shall have jurisdiction in the case of a charge against an elder or deacon. If the charge is proven, the elder or deacon may be suspended or deposed from office together with such other discipline as may be imposed in accordance with Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 1.<sup>4</sup>

#### ***Sec. 3. Discipline of a Commissioned Pastor***

Elders who are serving in a classis commission as a commissioned pastor are subject solely to the government and discipline of the classis. Commissioned pastors shall be subject to the same rules as ministers within Chapter 2, Part II.

#### ***Sec. 4. Discipline of a Minister of Word and Sacrament***

- a. Ministers are under the care of the classis and are subject to its government and discipline.
- b. The consistory has the right to close the pulpit to a minister who has been accused of any notorious or scandalous offense which would render appearance in the pulpit inappropriate. Proceedings of the consistory in such a case are at its peril, but are undertaken to prevent scandal. This action is not to be considered a trial. The

consistory must report its action to the classis immediately.<sup>5</sup>

- c. The classis **commission on judicial business** shall have exclusive jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a minister with the single exception noted below. If the charge is proven, the minister may be suspended or deposed from office, suspended from the privileges of membership in the church, and/or excommunicated.<sup>6</sup>
- d. In the case of charges against a minister who is also installed as a General Synod professor, charges concerning doctrine must first be considered by the General Synod **Commission on Judicial Business**. Either the accused or the classis may request the General Synod **Commission on Judicial Business** to review a charge, in order to determine whether the case concerns doctrine and thus must be heard at the General Synod **Commission on Judicial Business**. The classis shall stay further judicial action until the General Synod **Commission on Judicial Business** has made its determination over jurisdiction and completed any other appropriate judicial work related to the charge. The decision of the General Synod **Commission on Judicial Business** on jurisdiction is final. Once the General Synod **Commission on Judicial Business** has completed its judicial work, any further or remaining charges are the responsibility of the classis.

#### *Sec. 5. Discipline of a General Synod Professor*

- a. General Synod professors are amenable to the General Synod for their ministries of teaching and of certification of candidates for ministry, and in these ministries are subject to its government and discipline. The General Synod **Commission on Judicial Business** shall have original jurisdiction in the case of a charge against a General Synod professor only if that charge concerns matters of doctrine. If **a panel of** the Commission on Judicial Business determines that the charge concerns matters of doctrine and has merit, the **General-Synod panel** shall hear the case, but shall render judgment only on matters of doctrine. In all other cases, the **General-Synod panel** shall either dismiss the charge or, if appropriate, remand the charge for consideration by the classis in which the General Synod professor holds membership as a Minister of Word and Sacrament.

- b. ~~If the General Synod hears the case, the vice president of the General Synod shall not participate.~~ If the charge is proven, the General Synod professor may be admonished, rebuked, or removed from the office of General Synod professor. Any other discipline shall be determined by the classis in which the General Synod professor holds membership.
- c. When a charge against a General Synod professor is proven and discipline is imposed by the panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business, the professor may appeal the decision, within sixty days of the conclusion of the original trial, to the ~~next stated session of the General Synod~~ full Commission on Judicial Business.<sup>7</sup> ~~The General Synod Executive Committee shall appoint a committee to consider the appeal, which shall report its recommendation to the General Synod. The General Synod's action on the committee's recommendation shall be the final disposition of the case. All members of General Synod who participated in the first trial shall recuse themselves from consideration of the appeal.~~

#### *Sec. 6. Discipline of a Consistory*

Consistories are under the care of the classis and are subject to its government and discipline. A classis commission on judicial business has the authority, after trial, to suspend a consistory accused of unfaithfulness to duty, or of disobedience to the classis, or of violation of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or the laws and regulations of the church. If a consistory is suspended, all of its members shall be disqualified for re-election until the classis has removed the disqualification. The classis shall fulfill the responsibilities of the consistory (including those of the boards of elders and deacons) so suspended until a new consistory has been legally constituted.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Article 4. Procedure for Bringing a Charge<sup>9</sup>*

*Sec. 1.* A charge is a written accusation of an offense filed with the clerk of the responsible judicatory specifying the name of the accused, the nature of the alleged offense, and the time, place, and attendant circumstances of the alleged offense. (For the form of the charge, see Appendix, Formulary No. 12). The clerk of the judicatory shall provide a copy of the charge to the accused within three days of its receipt.<sup>10</sup>

**Sec. 2. A charge may be brought by an individual who is subject to the jurisdiction of the responsible judicatory. If the charge is brought by an individual, it must be signed by and made in the name of the individual who must come forward openly to support the charge(s) throughout the proceedings.<sup>11</sup>**

**Sec. 3. A committee designated by the responsible judicatory may also bring a charge.**

**Sec. 4. If filed by an individual, the charge shall be referred to an investigative committee appointed by the judicatory to determine whether there is sufficient merit to the charge to warrant further consideration. If a charge is filed by the committee designated by the judicatory, that same committee shall continue its proceedings to determine whether there is sufficient merit to the charge to warrant further consideration. In either case, in making this determination, the committee:<sup>12</sup>**

- a. May interview the accuser, the accused, or any witnesses.**
- b. Shall consider the number and credibility of witnesses and the length of time between the occurrence of the alleged offense and the date when allegations were made.**
- c. If the alleged offense occurred more than five years prior to the date of the charge, the charge shall be dismissed by the committee unless the committee concludes that circumstances prevented the accusation from being brought earlier. In considering whether such circumstances exist, the burden is on the accuser to provide the committee with information sufficient to support why the charge was not brought earlier. If the decision of the committee is that such circumstances exist, the committee shall state the reasons why it believes such circumstances exist in its report to the judicatory. If the committee fails to provide the reasons for such a decision in its report to the judicatory, the judicatory shall dismiss the charge.**
- d. Shall determine whether efforts to resolve the matter short of trial would be appropriate. Such efforts may include mediation, admission by the accused that the charge is true and acceptance of appropriate sanctions, or any other disposition to which the committee and the accused may agree. Any ~~demission, suspension, deposition, or excommunication~~ agreed-upon resolution must be approved by the appropriate judicatory.<sup>13</sup>**

**Sec. 5.** The committee shall conduct its work in a confidential manner in order to protect the reputations of all persons involved and to preserve the impartiality of the judicatory if the charge moves forward.

**Sec. 6.** If the charge is not otherwise resolved, and the committee determines there is sufficient merit in the charge, the judicatory shall proceed to trial. If there is not sufficient merit, the committee shall dismiss the charge. This dismissal shall be the final resolution of the charge.<sup>14</sup>

**Sec. 7.** The action of the committee shall be reported to the judicatory.<sup>15</sup>

***Article 5. Trying a Charge***<sup>16</sup>

**Sec. 1.** The clerk of the judicatory shall issue a citation (for the form of the citation to an accused person or consistory, see Appendix, Formulary No. 13) signed by the **president presiding officer** and **the** clerk, requesting the accused to appear before the judicatory at a specified time and place. The citation and a copy of the charge shall be provided to the accused.<sup>17</sup>

**Sec. 2.** The accused shall file a written reply to the charge with the clerk within twenty days of the receipt of the citation and a copy of the charge. If the accused acknowledges guilt or fails to file a reply to the charge, the judicatory shall impose the appropriate discipline.<sup>18</sup>

**Sec. 3.** The judicatory shall try the charge within thirty days of the filing of the reply, unless the trial is postponed to a later date by consent of the parties and the judicatory involved.

**Sec. 4.** The judicatory may try the charge, even though the accused is not present, if it is satisfied that proper notice was provided.

**Sec. 5.** The clerk of the judicatory shall issue citations to persons who are requested to appear as witnesses for or against the accused and, at the same time, shall provide a list of the witnesses to all parties. Persons who have not received a witness citation may be permitted to testify at the trial, if the presiding officer concludes that to allow the testimony is not fundamentally unfair.

**Sec. 6.** Neither the accuser, accused, counsel for any party, witnesses, clerk of the judicatory, members of the committee of

the judicatory as described in Chapter 2, Part II, Article 4, nor any person with a conflict of interest shall participate in the deliberation or the decision of the judicatory at any stage of the trial.<sup>19</sup>

**Sec. 7.** Unless the accused refuses or fails to appear after proper notice, witnesses shall be examined in the presence of the accused. The accused shall be permitted to cross-examine adverse witnesses. No affidavits shall be admitted.<sup>20</sup>

**Sec. 8.** The judicatory may, at its discretion, appoint a committee to take testimony of a party or witness at a location other than that of the place of hearing, upon request of any party. Ten days' notice shall be given to all parties of the appointment and membership of the committee and of the time and place of its meeting. The parties shall examine the witness(es) and shall have the right of cross-examination.<sup>21</sup>

**Sec. 9.** A verbatim record of the trial, including the judgment, shall be preserved and entered into the records of the judicatory. Parties to the case shall be given reasonable access to the record.

**Sec. 10.** Parties and the judicatory may be represented by counsel of their own choosing, provided that such counsel is a minister, elder, or confessing member of the Reformed Church in America. Counsel shall not be compensated for their time or efforts but may be reimbursed for expenses.<sup>22</sup>

***Sec. 11. Procedural Rules<sup>23</sup>***

- a. The judicatory shall establish such administrative rules for the trial as it deems appropriate to ensure that the trial will be conducted in a fair and impartial manner.
- b. No member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person connected with the case, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any charges before the final disposition of same, including appeals, if any.
- ~~c. The required quorum for a judicatory conducting a trial shall be the same as is required for a stated session of that assembly.~~
- ~~d.~~ The accuser shall be responsible for moving forward with the evidence.

- ed.** The charge(s) must be proven with a high degree of probability.<sup>24</sup>
- fe.** Receipt of evidence shall not be controlled by formal rules of evidence. However, the presiding officer may exclude any evidence if the officer determines that to admit such evidence would be fundamentally unfair.
- gf.** The only persons who may attend the trial are the parties, their counsel, the members of the judicatory, and such other persons as the judicatory deems appropriate.<sup>25</sup>
- hg.** Only members of the judicatory shall be present for the deliberation on the evidence. However, the counsel for the judicatory, if any, may be present.<sup>26</sup>

***Sec. 12. Procedural Rules for Trying a Charge against a General Synod Professor***

- a. A charge that a General Synod professor teaches doctrine contrary to Holy Scripture or the Standards of the Reformed Church in America may be submitted to the General Synod **by filing the charge with the moderator of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business** by a member of the synod. If a charge is brought against the professor at the classis level, either the professor or the classis may request **a panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business** to hear the case.
- b. ~~The charge shall be referred by the synod to A panel of the Commission on Judicial Business, which shall determine whether there is sufficient merit to the accusation that it be heard by the full synod.~~
- c. If the charge goes forward, it shall be heard by **a panel of the synod Commission on Judicial Business.**
- d. ~~The executive committee of the synod shall establish administrative rules for the hearing.~~
- ed.** The burden of proof shall be on the accuser, who is responsible for moving the charge forward.
- fe.** The accused shall have the right of cross-examination of adverse witnesses.

- gf.** Affidavits may not be used, but written evidence may be introduced, provided proper foundation has been laid. Written evidence may include arguments that support the accuser's charge as well as arguments from the accused.
- hg.** Either party may invite expert witnesses to testify on their behalf. Each party shall have the right to place questions to any expert witnesses.
- ~~**i.** The charge shall be considered as sustained with the vote of two-thirds of the synod. The vote shall be by written ballot.~~
- jh.** The ~~synod~~ panel of the Commission on Judicial Business shall state its reasons for its decision.
- ki.** Should the charge be sustained, the ~~synod~~ panel of the Commission on Judicial Business shall impose discipline. ~~The decision on discipline shall take place in such a manner that at least one calendar day shall have expired following the decision on the charge.~~

**Sec. 13. Decision by a Board of Elders**

- a.** The vote on whether the charge(s) has been proven shall be by written ballot. A simple majority of those present and voting shall be required to reach a decision.
- b.** The **judicatory** Board of Elders shall record its decision, stating the reasons therefor. A copy shall be provided to the parties.

**Sec. 14. Imposition of Discipline**

- a.** The judicatory shall impose such discipline as is appropriate for the offense and as is consistent with the Holy Scriptures and the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.<sup>27</sup>
- b.** The judicatory shall record its actions, stating the reasons ~~therefor. A copy shall be provided to the parties.~~ Official notification shall be provided to the parties within 30 days of the decision.

**Sec. 15.** The recorded decision and the disciplinary action shall be made available upon request to other assemblies within the Reformed Church in America and other appropriate

ecclesiastical bodies. In addition, the judicatory, at its discretion, may distribute the recorded decision and disciplinary action to assemblies within the Reformed Church in America.<sup>28</sup>

***Article 6. Restoration and Reinstatement***

**Sec. 1.** A member who has been suspended or excommunicated may be restored to the privileges of membership in the church upon repentance expressed before the judicatory which suspended or excommunicated the member. If public notice of the judgment of excommunication had been given, due public notice of reinstatement shall also be given the congregation.

**Sec. 2.** A person who has been suspended or deposed from office may be restored to office upon repentance and renewal of vows before the judicatory which suspended or deposed that person, provided that the judicatory is satisfied that the honor of the office will not be impaired and that the welfare of the church will be served by such a restoration, and provided that the restoration is approved by a two-thirds vote of those present at the meeting of the judicatory. Restoration after deposition shall include reordination to office.<sup>29</sup>

**(bb)** *Chapter 2, Part III (formerly Chapter 2, Part II) (2023 edition, pp. 91-93)*

**Part III** Complaints

***Article 1. Nature of Complaints***

**Sec. 1.** A complaint is a written statement alleging that an action or a decision of an assembly or its officer has violated or failed to comply with the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or other laws and regulations of the church.

**Sec. 2.** Grounds for complaint include any action or decision that is harmful to the church, whether the alleged error of the assembly or its officer is procedural or substantive, and specifically would include, but are not limited to, irregularity in the proceedings; refusal of reasonable indulgence to any person or entity involved in or affected by the decision or action; manifestation of bias or prejudice in the decision or action; and manifest injustice.

**Sec. 3.** A complaint may be filed only with the appropriate judicatory; ~~that has immediate superintendence of the assembly.~~

- a.** In the event of a complaint against a consistory or its officer, the complaint is filed with the clerk of the classis that has immediate superintendence of the consistory.
- b.** In the event of a complaint against a classis or its officer, the complaint is filed with the moderator of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business.

**Sec. 4.** A complaint may be filed only by:

- a.** One or more confessing members in good and regular standing against the consistory or board of elders having superintendence over them.
- b.** One or more members of an assembly against that assembly of which they are members.
- c.** An assembly against that assembly having immediate superintendence over it.

**Sec. 5.** Neither notice of intent to complain nor the complaint itself shall have the effect of suspending the action against which the complaint is made, unless within thirty days one-third of the members of the assembly complained against who were present when the action was taken file with the clerk of the judicatory in which the complaint is filed a request for such suspension until a decision is made in the higher judicatory. The clerk, upon receipt of the request for suspension, shall immediately notify, in writing, the clerk of the assembly complained against, and shall request the clerk of the assembly to certify a list of those members of the assembly present when the action complained against was taken.

#### ***Article 2. Process for Complaints***

**Sec. 1.** Written notice of intent to complain shall be filed with an officer or with the clerk of the assembly which took the action in question. This filing shall be completed not later than twenty days after having received official notification of the action taken. In default of this requirement, the case shall not be heard.

**Sec. 2.** The complaint and the reasons therefor shall be filed with the clerk of the higher judicatory within twenty days after the filing of notice of intent. In default of this requirement, the complaint shall be considered to be dismissed and the clerk of the higher judicatory shall notify the parties involved.

**Sec. 3.** Within twenty days after receiving a copy of the complaint the clerk of the lower assembly shall file with the clerk of the higher judicatory the original record of all the proceedings pertaining to the complaint, including the notice of intent and any other documents bearing on the complaint. These constitute the record of the case. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall forward upon receipt to each of the parties a copy of the record of the case and all documents subsequently submitted in the case to the higher judicatory.

**Sec. 4.** The clerk of the higher judicatory shall, upon receiving the record, promptly notify its judicial business **committee commission**, call a meeting of the **committee commission** at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The **committee commission** shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The **committee commission** shall promptly advise the **several** parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The **committee commission** may request further written response or arguments to be submitted within the same twenty days. ~~If less than thirty days remain before the next stated session of the judicatory to which the committee is to report and the committee determines that it is unable to prepare an acceptable report, it shall immediately record this determination and the reasons therefor with the clerk of such judicatory and request permission to delay its report until the next session. The clerk shall promptly confer with the officers of the judicatory who shall promptly rule upon the request.~~

**Sec. 5.** If the case is in proper order, the **committee commission** shall then consider its merits. If the complaint is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the **committee commission** may dismiss the complaint without a hearing. If the complaint goes forward, the **committee commission** shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted and shall also hear the parties together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in ~~Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10~~ **the Judicial Procedures**. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and

impartial manner with all parties present. If the complainant in person or by counsel fails to appear, the ~~committee~~ commission may declare the case to be defaulted.

~~Sec. 6. The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory by a date determined by the parent judicatory prior to the next stated session or a special session and shall furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. After receiving the report of the committee the judicatory may request to hear the original parties in the case with their counsel. The recommendation(s) of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended, or referred back to the committee.~~ The judicatory may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the action of the lower assembly, or remand the matter to it with instructions. The commission shall record its decision, stating the reasons. Decisions of the commission shall be reported in writing to the assembly on behalf of which it acts at the next stated session. Official notification shall be provided to the parties within 30 days of the decision.

Sec. 7. Persons who have voted on the matter complained against in a lower assembly or who have a conflict of interest shall not vote upon the case in ~~a higher~~ another judicatory.

~~Sec. 8. The judicatory shall record its decision, stating the reasons therefor.~~

Sec. ~~9~~8. When a complaint is filed, the complainant has the burden of moving forward and proving by a preponderance of the evidence that the respondent has violated or failed to comply with the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America or other laws and regulations of the church.<sup>30</sup>

Sec. ~~10~~9. No member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person connected with the matter, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any complaints before the final disposition of same, including appeals, if any.

Sec. ~~11~~10. No complaint can be taken against any action or decision of the General Synod.

(cc) *Chapter 2, Part IV (formerly Chapter 2, Part III) (2023 edition, pp. 95-98)*

Part **III** IV Appeals

*Article 1. Nature of an Appeal*

**Sec. 1.** An appeal is the transfer to a higher judicatory of a complaint, a charge, or an appeal on which judgment has been rendered in a lower judicatory. The right of appeal belongs to either of the original parties in a case. That right may be exercised when a party considers itself to be aggrieved or injured by a judgment of a judicatory.

**Sec. 2.** An appeal may also be a transfer of a charge against a General Synod professor on whom a judgment has been rendered. The appeal shall be made to the full General Synod Commission on Judicial Business **immediately following the synod that rendered the original judgment**. In an appeal of this nature, any reference in this Part to a “lower judicatory” shall be deemed to refer to the panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business that rendered the original judgment and any reference in this Part to “higher judicatory” shall be deemed to mean the full General Synod Commission on Judicial Business to which the appeal is made.

**Sec. 3.** The grounds of appeal include: irregularity in the proceedings of the lower judicatory; refusal of reasonable indulgence to a party on trial; receiving improper, or declining to receive proper, evidence; rendering a decision before all the testimony is taken; bias or prejudice in the case; and manifest injustice in the judgment.

**Sec. 4.** Notice of intent to appeal suspends the judgment of the lower judicatory until the appeal is finally decided. But when the judgment which is appealed from results in suspension, deposition from office, or excommunication, the person against whom the judgment has been pronounced shall be required to refrain from the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and from the exercise of office until the appeal is finally decided, unless exception is made in the judgment of the lower judicatory.

**Sec. 5.** The **regional-synod** full classis shall be the final court of appeal for all cases originally heard by a board of elders. A panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business shall be the final court of appeal for all cases originally heard by

a classis commission on judicial business. The full General Synod Commission on Judicial Business shall be the final court of appeal for all other matters. ~~However, the General Synod may hear such an appeal if one delegate to the regional synod from each of the classes in that regional synod, with the exception of the classis from whose action the appeal is taken, shall give written notice to the clerk of the regional synod within thirty days of its adjournment that there is just cause for appealing a case to the General Synod.~~

## *Article 2. Process for Appeals*

**Sec. 1.** Written notice of intent to appeal shall be filed with an officer or with the clerk of the judicatory which took the action in question. This filing shall be completed not later than twenty days after having received official notification of the action taken. In default of this requirement, the appeal shall not be heard.

**Sec. 2.** The appeal and the reasons therefor shall be filed with the clerk of the higher judicatory within twenty days after the filing of notice of intent. In default of this requirement, the appeal shall be considered to be dismissed and the clerk of the higher judicatory shall notify the parties involved.

**Sec. 3.** Within twenty days after receiving a copy of the appeal the clerk of the lower judicatory shall file with the clerk of the higher judicatory the original record of all the proceedings in the case, including the notice of intent, the evidence, the arguments, and any other documents bearing on the case. These constitute the record of the case. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall forward upon receipt to each of the parties a copy of the record of the case and all documents subsequently submitted in the case to the higher judicatory. The higher judicatory shall not admit or consider as evidence anything not found in this record without consent of the parties.

**Sec. 4.** The clerk of the higher judicatory shall, upon receiving the record of the case, promptly notify ~~its judicial business committee~~ the higher judicatory, call a meeting of the ~~committee~~ judicatory at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The ~~committee~~ judicatory shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The ~~committee~~ judicatory shall promptly advise the ~~several~~ parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to

correct such irregularities. The **committee judicatory** may request further written response or arguments. ~~If less than thirty days remain before the next stated session of the judicatory to which the committee is to report and the committee determines that it is unable to prepare an acceptable report, it shall immediately record this determination and the reasons therefor with the clerk of such judicatory and request permission to delay its report until the next session. The clerk shall promptly confer with the officers of the judicatory who shall promptly rule upon the request.~~

**Sec. 5.** ~~In an appeal of a A General Synod professor, the clerk of the General Synod shall notify its executive committee, which will promptly appoint a new committee to consider the appeal~~ may file an appeal of a decision of a panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business with the moderator of the Commission. The **committee moderator** will call a meeting of all the members of the Commission on Judicial Business at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The **committee full Commission** shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The **committee Commission** shall promptly advise the **several** parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The **committee Commission** may request further written responses or arguments.

**Sec. 6.** If the case is in proper order, the **committee commission** shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. If the appeal is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the **committee commission** may dismiss the appeal without a hearing. If the appeal goes forward, the **committee commission** shall also hear the original parties, together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in **Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10** the Judicial Procedures. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Either party may elect not to appear in person or by counsel at the hearing.

**Sec. 7.** ~~The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory by a date determined by the parent judicatory prior to the next stated session or a special session and shall furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. After receiving the report of the committee, the judicatory may request to hear the original parties in the case~~

~~with their counsel. The recommendation(s) of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended, or referred back to the committee.~~ The judicatory may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the decision of the lower judicatory or assembly, or remand the case to it with instructions.

**Sec. 8.** Persons who have voted on the matter in a lower judicatory or assembly, or who have a conflict of interest, shall not vote upon the appeal in a higher judicatory.

**Sec. 9.** The judicatory shall record its decision, stating the reasons therefor.

**Sec. 10.** When an appeal is filed, the appellant shall have the responsibility to establish that the lower judicatory erred in its decision.

**Sec. 11.** The judicatory hearing the appeal shall give deference to the decision of the lower judicatory, particularly in the matter of credibility of witnesses, and shall uphold the decision of the lower judicatory if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole.<sup>31</sup>

**Sec. 12.** No member or groups of the Reformed Church in America, nor any person connected with the case, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any appeals before the final disposition of same.

**Sec. 13.** No appeal can be taken from any decision of the full General Synod Commission on Judicial Business.

The following segment of this recommendation involves amendments to Chapter 3 of the *Book of Church Order*. These are not constitutional, meaning that they do not require the approval of the classes, but only of two meetings of the General Synod (BCO Chapter 3, Part I, Article 12 [2023 edition, p. 127]).

**And further, to approve the following amendments to the Bylaws of the General Synod (*Book of Church Order* Chapter 3) for submission to the 2025 General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):**

**(dd) Chapter 3, Part I, Article 1, Section 1c (2023 edition, p. 107)**

**c. The configuration of classes ~~and regional synods~~ for determining delegates to the General Synod shall be as of**

December 31st of the year immediately preceding the year in which General Synod is convened.

(ee) *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 1b (2023 edition, p. 108)*

*Sec. 1. Membership*

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

...

- b. ~~One~~ Eight members recommended by ~~each regional synod~~ the classes from among ~~its~~ their regular classical delegates to the immediately preceding General Synod, and elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations using an equitable rotation of the classes as determined by the General Synod.

(ff) *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3, Section 3 (2023 edition, p. 109)*

*Sec. 3. Term of Office*

The term of office for the elected member shall be four years. Members shall be ineligible for two years after they have served their term. Members who have served a partial term of less than two years shall be eligible for an additional full four-year term. The term of office shall be from July 1 of the year they are elected and be completed on June 30. An employee of the GSC, ~~the regional synods,~~ or the classes of the Reformed Church in America may not hold membership on the council. General Synod officers shall serve as members of the council for one additional year following the expiration of their General Synod term of office.

(gg) *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 4, Section 2 (2023 edition, p. 112)*

*Sec. 2. Eligibility*

Membership on General Synod agencies and commissions shall be open to all confessing members of the churches of the RCA, with the exception of the voting members of the Commission on Judicial Business, which is open only to those in the RCA who are ordained either as elders or ministers. An employee of the General Synod Council may not hold membership on the agency or commission to which that person is accountable unless specifically provided in the agency constitution or bylaws; nor may an executive employed by the General Synod Council ~~or any of the regional synods~~ hold other than *ex-officio* membership on the General Synod Council.

(hh) *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 6a (2023 edition, p. 116)*

*Sec. 6. Commission on Judicial Business*

a. **Membership**

~~The commission shall have eight members, one representing each of the regional synods. Each regional synod shall nominate a layperson or a minister in alternating six-year periods in order to ensure that the commission will have within its membership at least three laypersons and at least three ministers. Legal training and experience shall be required of lay members. A broad knowledge of and background in the structure, government, and function of the denomination shall be required of all members.~~

Each classis shall nominate one elder or minister, as determined by the Commission on Nominations, for election by the General Synod to form the Commission. The Commission on Nominations shall ensure equal representation of elders and ministers on this commission. Broad knowledge of and background in the structure, government, and function of the denomination shall be required of all members. Orientation and training of new members shall be provided by the General Synod. The term of office for a member shall be for three years, with one-third of the members' terms expiring each year.

The Commission on Nominations shall nominate a person to be the moderator of the Commission on Judicial Business, who shall not be a person nominated by a classis, to serve on the Commission. The moderator need not be an office holder but must have legal training and experience and/or significant experience with, knowledge of, and background in the structure, government, and function of the denomination.

(ii) *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 5, Section 8a and c (2023 edition, pp. 117-118)*

*Sec. 8. Commission on Nominations*

a. **Membership**

The commission shall have thirteen members, eight representing ~~each of the regional synods~~ classes, one representing African-Americans, Hispanics, Native American Indians, and Pacific and Asian Americans, respectively, and one being the immediate past president of General Synod. Each ~~regional synod~~ classis shall nominate a layperson or a minister member of classis who is either a minister or commissioned pastor in alternating ~~six-year~~ periods of equitable rotation in order to ensure that the commission will have within its membership at least three laypersons and at least three ministers members of classis. The members representing African-Americans, Hispanics, Native American Indians, and Pacific and Asian Americans shall be nominated by their respective councils or representative bodies.

c. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall nominate members for the General Synod Council and all General Synod commissions and agencies, unless otherwise specified in the Bylaws.
2. The commission, in consultation with the general secretary, shall search the denomination for suitable nominees. In making nominations it shall consider the geographic location, occupation, and record of previous service to the denomination of persons suggested by classes, ~~regional synods~~, and other sources. It shall consider this and other pertinent data in light of each commission's or agency's responsibilities, membership needs, suggested nominees, and place and schedule of meetings.
3. The commission members shall, in consultation with the stated clerks of the classes ~~and regional synods from which they are appointed~~, be responsible for gathering information on nominees ~~within the bounds of the respective synods~~.

...

(jj) *Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 11 (2023 edition, p. 125)*

*Sec. 11. ~~Regional Synods~~ Women and Youth Corresponding Delegates*

- a. ~~Two women shall be appointed corresponding delegates by each regional synod; said appointments may be made in consultation with the Commission for Women.~~ Each of sixteen classes determined using an equitable rotation may appoint one woman as a corresponding delegate. These appointments may be made in consultation with the Commission for Women.
- b. ~~One young adult may be appointed as a corresponding delegate by each regional synod.~~ Each of eight classes determined using an equitable rotation may appoint one young adult as a corresponding delegate.
- c. ~~The regional synod executive shall be a corresponding delegate to the General Synod.~~ Each classis may only appoint one woman or youth corresponding delegate at each General Synod.

(kk) *Chapter 3, Part II, Article 2, Section 7 (2023 edition, p. 132)*

*Sec. 7. Submission of Overtures*

The General Synod may receive overtures from a classis ~~or a regional synod~~. It shall not receive overtures which deal with matters under adjudication or which make either direct or implied charges against persons. Overtures from classes shall be submitted to the General Synod office no later than two months before a session of General Synod. ~~Overtures from regional synods shall be submitted to the General Synod office no later than three weeks before a session of General Synod.~~

**Elections and Appointments**

The commission elected Christopher Jacobsen to serve as both its moderator and secretary for the annual term beginning July 1, 2024. Additionally, the commission appointed Philip De Koster to serve as its corresponding delegate to the 2024 General Synod.