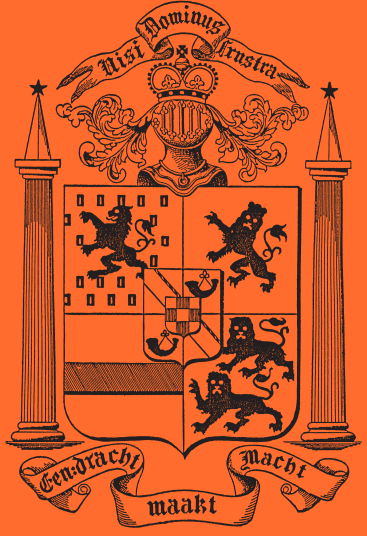

BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

2026 MIDDLE ASSEMBLY EDITION

Effective as of December 30, 2026

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

THE BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER

including

The Government

The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures

The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order
of the
General Synod

The Formularies

THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

2026 EDITION, MIDDLE ASSEMBLY VERSION
This version of the *Book of Church Order*, printed in English,
is the authoritative text.

This edition of the *Book of Church Order* is effective
as of December 30, 2026.

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How to Use the *Book of Church Order*

Getting Started

Start by reading the Preamble; it defines basic terms and principles of church order that provide an important foundation for understanding the rest of the book. Then, if you are only interested in issues relating to the local church, read Chapter 1, Part I, which is titled, "The Consistory."

Contents

The *BCO* is divided into three chapters, followed by an appendix. Chapter 1 contains the Government, Chapter 2 contains the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, and Chapter 3 contains the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod. Chapter 1 is divided further by the assemblies of the church: Part I deals with the consistory; Part II, the middle assembly; and Part III, the General Synod.

If you are looking for a particular subject, you can scan the table of contents or refer to the glossary. The glossary does not have constitutional authority but provides definitions to assist in understanding the *BCO*. If you want to know more about disciplinary procedures, the explanatory notes following Chapter 2 are helpful. You can also download a copy of the *BCO* from the RCA website (www.rca.org/bco) and search for the word or phrase that interests you. It is wise to read every statement in its context, which may mean reading the entire part.

Interpretation

If you are still wondering how to interpret a provision of the *BCO* after reading through an entire part, you can start by contacting your pastor or the stated clerk of your middle assembly. If they cannot answer your question, they will probably direct you to someone who can. The middle assembly clerks have an informal network of people who can offer help.

The *Minutes of General Synod* (*MGS*) can be found on the RCA website at www.rca.org/minutes. You can use the references to the *MGS* in the *BCO* to discover the background of recent amendments. Note that references for amendments that became effective prior to December 30, 2026, can be found in the 2026 (Classis version) *Book of Church Order*, which will remain available on the RCA website for historical purposes. You may also purchase *Constitutional Theology*, a commentary on the *BCO* by Allan Janssen.

If you are still uncertain, you may request an advisory opinion from the Commission on Church Order, which has the responsibility of providing responses to requests for interpretation of the *BCO*. You do not need to submit an overture to receive a response; a letter or email is all that is necessary.

Freedom and Flexibility

The *BCO* doesn't cover every question about church order that you may encounter. The RCA's church order book is relatively short when compared with those of other denominations. The *BCO* gives authority to the assemblies to decide many issues related to the general superintendence of the church.

This guide was approved for use by the Commission on Church Order in February 2002 and updated in January 2020 and July 2026.

An Introduction to the *Book of Church Order*

What is church order and why do we need it?

Church order provides a way for us to live and work together as the body of Christ, following the admonition that "all things be done decently and in order" (1 Corinthians 14:40). Order is a way to express our unity and achieve cooperation and harmony in the body of Christ as we seek to fulfill our mission. It is our theology lived out in the ways we live and work together.

How is our order unique?

Our representative, or presbyterial, order places authority in a series of representative assemblies of those elected and ordained to offices within the church. Our order is at the midpoint between two other forms of church government: the episcopal form that gives authority to bishops, and the congregational form that grants congregations individual autonomy and provides only loose associations with other churches.

What are the offices of our church?

We have four offices. Three offices are involved in the government of the church: Minister of Word and Sacrament, elder, and deacon. A fourth office, General Synod professor, is employed in the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency for the training of students for the ministry. Those who are ordained to office act as servants who represent Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. The existence of offices in the church does not diminish the importance of the common ministry of all members of the church. The church has one ministry—the ministry of Christ.

What are the assemblies of our church?

The three assemblies, or governing bodies, are the consistory, the middle assembly, and the General Synod.

Why do we rely on assemblies?

Following the example of the early church, we believe that decisions should be made by gathering people together to discern the will of God. Since the whole church cannot meet together at one time and place to make decisions, representative governing bodies made of those who hold an office within the church are established to carry out the work of the church at various levels. The unity of the church is preserved when we accept the decisions made by those who serve in the assemblies of the church.

Is our church order the only guide for our church?

No, along with the *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*)—which includes the Government of the Reformed Church in America and the Disciplinary Procedures—we have the Doctrinal Standards (which are the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism with its Compendium, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and the Belhar Confession) and the Liturgy with the Directory for Worship. Our theology, liturgy, and government act like a skeleton to hold the church together, providing a framework for the ministry of the church.

Where can I find a copy of the Book of Church Order*?*

You can order the *BCO* or you can download it free from the RCA website at www.rca.org/bco.

This guide was approved for use by the Commission on Church Order in February 2002 and updated in 2010, 2011, and 2026.

CONTENTS

PREAMBLE 1

Chapter 1. The Government

PART I. The Consistory

Article 1. Definitions 11
Article 2. Responsibilities of the Consistory 14
Article 3. Officers of the Consistory 19
Article 4. Transaction of Business 20
Article 5. Responsibilities of the Board of Elders 20
Article 6. Responsibilities of the Board of Deacons 22
Article 7. Union Churches 23
Article 8. Federated Churches 24
Article 9. Affiliated Churches 25

PART II. The Middle Assembly

Article 1. Middle Assembly Defined 27
Article 2. Responsibilities of the Middle Assembly 27
Article 3. Elder Delegates 29
Article 4. Sessions of the Middle Assembly 29
Article 5. Officers of the Middle Assembly 30
Article 6. Transaction of Business 30
Article 7. Superintendence of the Local and Organizing Churches 31
Article 8. Organizing a Church 34
Article 9. Superseding a Consistory 36
Article 10. Disbanding or Transferring a Church 39
Article 11. Supervision of Candidates for Ministry 43
Article 12. Certificates of Readiness for Examination 45
Article 13. Supervision of Licensure and Ordination 48
Article 14. Reception of Ministers and Licensed Candidates from Other Denominations 49
Article 15. Supervision of Ministers of Word and Sacrament 52
Article 16. Commissioning and Supervision of Preaching Elders 57
Article 17. Commissioning and Supervision of Commissioned Pastors 58

Article 18. Certification and Supervision of Associates in Ministry....60
Article 19. Relation to General Synod....61

PART III. The General Synod
Article 1. General Synod Defined....63
Article 2. Responsibilities of the General Synod....63
Article 3. Delegates....64
Article 4. Sessions and Meetings of General Synod....65
Article 5. Officers of the General Synod....66
Article 6. Transaction of Business....67
Article 7. Committees, Boards, and Agencies of the General Synod....67
Article 8. The Office of General Synod Professor....68

RULES AND AMENDMENTS....71
Applicable to Chapters 1 and 2, the Formularies (see Appendix below), and the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America—all of which are constitutional elements of Reformed Church Order, requiring middle assemblies' approval.

Chapter 2. The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures

PART I. Judicatories
Article 1. Nature of Judicatories....75
Article 2. Composition of Judicatories....75
Article 3. General Procedures for a Commission on Judicial Business....77

PART II. Discipline
Article 1. Nature of Discipline....79
Article 2. Nature of Offenses....79
Article 3. Responsibilities for Discipline....79
Article 4. Procedure for Bringing a Charge....82
Article 5. Trying a Charge....84
Article 6. Restoration and Reinstatement....87

PART III. Complaints
Article 1. Nature of Complaints....89
Article 2. Process for Complaints....90

PART IV. Appeals
Article 1. Nature of an Appeal 93
Article 2. Process for Appeals....94

EXPLANATORY NOTES ON CHAPTER 2: THE DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES 96

Chapter 3. The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order

PART I. The Bylaws of the General Synod
Article 1. Privileges and Duties of Delegates 105
Article 2. Election of President and Vice-President....105
Article 3. General Synod Council 106
Article 4. Membership on General Synod Agencies and Commissions....109
Article 5. Commissions....111
Article 6. The Professorate....120
Article 7. General Synod Agencies 121
Article 8. Advisory Committees 121
Article 9. Corresponding Delegates 122
Article 10. Committee on Emergencies 124
Article 11. Rules of Order....125
Article 12. Amendments 126

PART II. Special Rules of Order of the General Synod
Article 1. Order of Business....127
Article 2. Presentation of Business 128
Article 3. Transaction of Business 131

APPENDIX: THE FORMULARIES

1. Declaration for Licensed Candidates....133
2. Attestation of a Licensed Candidate 133
3. Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament 134
4. Attestation of an Ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament....135
5. Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament....136
6. Appointment of a General Synod Professor 138
7. Declaration for a General Synod Professor 138
8. Application for the Dissolution of a Pastoral Relationship 139
9. Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament 140

10. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church Member 141
11. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church to Another Denomination ...142
12. Charge 143
13. Citation to an Accused Person or Consistory 144
14. Citation to a Witness 145
15. Provision for Articles of Incorporation for Congregations 145
16. Declaration for Commissioned Pastors 146
17. Certificate of Transfer for a Licensed Candidate 147
18. Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament to Another Denomination 148
19. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church to Another Middle Assembly 149

REFERENCES TO THE *MINUTES OF GENERAL SYNOD* 150

A GLOSSARY OF THE *BOOK OF CHURCH ORDER* OF THE REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA 151

Preamble

The purpose of the Reformed Church in America, together with all other churches of Christ, is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works. That purpose is achieved most effectively when good order and proper discipline are maintained by means of certain offices, governmental agencies, and theological and liturgical standards. The Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in America. Its Constitution consists of the Doctrinal Standards (which are the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism with its Compendium, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and the Belhar Confession), the Liturgy with the Directory for Worship, the Government of the Reformed Church in America, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, this Preamble, and the Formularies.

The three basic or focal governmental units in the Reformed Church in America are the consistory, the middle assembly, and the General Synod. The consistory is divided further into a board of elders and a board of deacons. The board of elders, the middle assembly, 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.

The governmental functioning of these offices takes place, not apart from, but in harmony with the understanding of the mission of the church and the nature of its ministry. This basic affirmation has three consequences. First, the purpose of church government is to aid the church in the development of its own life, in order that it may carry out the mission of its Head—to announce the good news of his Saviorhood and extend his Lordship throughout the world. Second, there is only one ministry and that ministry is shared by all Christians. The particular ministries of those who hold office arise out of this common ministry in order to serve it. Third, the ecclesiastical offices that

the Reformed Church deems necessary for its ordering are understood to be essentially functional in nature, and the term "office" is everywhere viewed in terms of service.

The Reformed Church in America is organized and governed according to the presbyterial order. That order is inspired and directed by certain basic principles. They are as follows:

The Nature of the Church on Earth. The church, which Scripture represents with many images, is a gathering of persons chosen in Christ through the Holy Spirit to profess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in order to embody God's intentions for the world. Gathered by the Spirit around Word and sacrament, the church fulfills its call within the expectation of the reign of God as it participates in mission, in calling all persons to life in Christ, and in proclaiming God's promise and commands to all the world.

The Reformed churches confess that the church of Jesus Christ in the world is one church, the "Holy Catholic Church." The church is the living communion of the one people of God with the one Christ who is their Head. Their oneness in him is a "communion of the saints" with Christ and with one another in the divine blessings.

The Head of the Church. The Reformed churches confess that Jesus Christ is the only Head of his church. The Scriptures call the church his body, and our Lord the Head of that body. He is therefore in the closest and most vital relationship to his church. As the church's true Head, he has complete authority over its life, and therefore the church must ever yield to him a ready obedience and faithfulness. Christ's headship is one of righteousness, love, and tenderness toward his people.

The Nature of the Church's Authority. All authority exercised in the church is received from Christ, the only Head of the church. The authority exercised by those holding office in the church is delegated authority. Their appointment to their special tasks is by the Spirit of the Lord, and they are responsible first of all to the Lord of the church. Their authority is of three kinds: ministerial, declarative, and spiritual. Ministerial authority is the right to act as Christ's servants. Declarative authority is the right to speak in his name within the limits set by Scripture. The church shall declare what is in the Word and act upon it, and may not properly go beyond this. Spiritual authority is the right to govern the life and activity of the church and to administer its affairs. The

church shall not exercise authority over the state, nor should the state usurp authority over the church.

The Spiritual authority given to office-holders is exercised in the assemblies of the church. The offices meeting together represent the fullness of Christ's ministry. No office functions apart from the other offices. Reformed governance understands that the greater assemblies care for the ministry that extends beyond the purview of the lesser assemblies without infringing upon the responsibilities of the lesser. Consistories, middle assemblies, and the General Synod work together in mission and ministry within their shared boundaries.

Membership Categories and Definitions. Membership in congregations of the Reformed Church in America includes "confessing" members, "baptized" members, and "inactive" members. Reformed Church in America congregations also include "adherents."

"Confessing" members are members who have received Christian baptism and have been received by the board of elders through profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or presentation of a satisfactory certificate of transfer of membership from another Christian church, and who make faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the use of the Lord's Supper.

"Baptized" members are members who have received Christian baptism, who may or may not participate at the Lord's Table, and who have not been received by the board of elders as confessing members.

"Inactive" members are members who have been removed by the board of elders from the confessing membership list.

"Members" are all confessing members, baptized members, and inactive members.

"Adherents" are all who participate in the life, work, and worship of the church, but are not members.

The Representative Principle. The power that Jesus Christ bestows upon his church is mediated by the Holy Spirit to people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. Since not everyone in the church can hold an office, and since

the offices differ among themselves in function, some persons will always be subject, within the proper exercise of authority, to the decisions of others. Since the whole church cannot meet together at one time and place to deliberate, representative governing bodies must be established on the various levels. The unity of the church is preserved in acceptance of the fact that all are governed by the decisions made on their behalf by those who represent them.

Government by Elders. The Reformed churches have sought to follow the practice of the churches whose experience is recorded in the New Testament. The churches then were ruled by "presbyters" or "elders," just as the synagogues from which the first Christian converts came were ruled by elders. The Reformed churches consider the minister to be an elder of a special kind, called in some churches of the Reformed order, the "teaching elder." Ministers and elders therefore govern the church together. They also assist in the governing of the larger church by becoming from time to time members of the higher legislative assemblies or courts of the church. Thus also the lines of authority in the Reformed churches move from the local church to the General Synod. This is so since Christ, according to the New Testament, has appointed officers to govern the church under himself. Their authority to govern derives from him even though they are elected by the people. The local churches together delegate authority to middle assemblies and 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.

While governance of the Reformed church is executed through the offices gathered in assemblies, the church expresses its full ministry through all its members in a variety of tasks. Each assembly is charged with determining the nature and extent of its ministry in faithful obedience to Scripture and in responsible concern for the church's mission in the world. Every member, regardless of ability, gender, race, ethnicity, color, or class, receives a ministry in baptism and is called with the whole church to embody Christ's intentions for the world.

The Equality of the Ministry. The Reformed Church in America uses the term "parity" to describe its concept of the equality of ministers. It is not meant that authority can never be exercised by one over the other. But in every instance this authority will be delegated by the proper body, and the authority will cease to be exercised when the need for it is no longer demanded. The

principle of equality pertains also among churches, among elders, and among deacons. The principle of the equality of the ministry, conceived now in its broadest sense as including the functions of the elder and the deacon, is based upon the fact that the entire ministerial or pastoral office is summed up in Jesus Christ himself in such a way that he is, in a sense, the only one holding that office. Every ministerial function is found preeminently in him. By his Holy Spirit he distributes these functions among those whom he calls to serve in his name. Therefore, the church continually seeks to equip, empower, and embrace servant leaders who reflect the full diversity of the body of Christ. The church is called to reform any biases, behaviors, policies, or procedures that diminish the spiritual gifts or contributions of any Christian due to ability, gender, race, ethnicity, color, or class.

A Historical Note

The Reformed Church in America is part of the Reformed tradition in the worldwide Church of Jesus Christ. The RCA has its immediate source in the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and other European countries. These churches grew out of attempts to reform the church catholic in the sixteenth century. Such reform is committed to be ongoing and is guided "according to the Scriptures"—both Old and New Testaments—as the revealed Word of God. Throughout history, reformers have not sought revolution but genuine reform in faith and life. The RCA is grateful to be recognized as a church that emphasizes giving an account of the hope we have in Christ Jesus in word and deed; the RCA values faithful and articulate theology and has demonstrated a deep commitment to ministries of mission. The RCA celebrates its bond of community with all other churches of Christ and values the heritage it shares with other faith communities who call on the God of Abraham.

The Netherlands Reformed Church was formally organized in 1566. In that year a synod held at Antwerp adopted the Belgic Confession of Faith and formulated some preliminary rules of church government. These rules were revised at succeeding synods, receiving at the Synod of Dort in 1619 a form that lasted for nearly two centuries in the Netherlands. The Netherlands liturgy and the Heidelberg Catechism were adopted by a synod held at Emden in 1571. The Compendium of the Heidelberg Catechism was formulated in 1608. The Canons of Dort were framed by the synod held in Dort in 1619.

The three doctrinal statements named above, together with the Belhar Confession (see below), are the Standards of the Reformed Church in

America. The Netherlands liturgy was adopted by the American church and has retained much of its original character. The rules of church government of 1619 were translated into English in 1792. "Explanatory Articles," adapting the rules to American conditions, were added. In 1833 the rules and explanatory articles were formed into a single document organized into appropriate articles. Several general revisions of this "Constitution" (actually only part of the Constitution) have been made since then, notably in 1874, 1910-1916, 1958-1959, and 1965-1968. The amendment of the church's document of government is an almost annual process.

On the American continent, what began as the Reformed Dutch Church in the 1620s became the "Reformed Church in America" in 1867. While most Scottish Reformed Churches are known as "Presbyterian," and many German Reformed congregations became the "Reformed Church in the United States" (later to become part of the United Church of Christ), the change of name reflected that congregations with Dutch, French, Hungarian, Swiss, Italian, and German Reformed roots had become part of the RCA. The RCA incorporates churches in Canada as well as the USA. In 2010 the Belhar Confession was adopted as a Standard. The Belhar Confession originated in the Dutch Reformed Mission Church of South Africa (later to become part of the Uniting Reformed Church of Southern Africa.)

Incorporation of the General Synod

The *General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church* was incorporated by an Act of the Legislature of the State of New York, passed April 7, 1819. Chapter 197 of the laws of 1869, passed April 15, 1869, changed the name to the *General Synod of the Reformed Church in America*. An Act of the Legislature of the State of New York that was signed by the Governor May 3, 1920, (Chapter 451 of the Laws of 1920) authorized the General Synod to elect six directors of the corporation. Section 1 of the Act of 1920 reads as follows:

> The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, formerly the General Synod of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, shall be and hereby is declared to be a body corporate and politic by the name and style of "The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America," with full power to sue and be sued, defend and be defended by that name, in all courts of law and equity and to have a common seal, and to alter the same at pleasure; and also to take purchase and hold real

and personal estate, and to sell and convey the same, subject to the limitations prescribed by law, and the same shall not be appropriated to any other than religious and charitable uses and purposes.

The General Synod of 1979 authorized the members of the General Synod Executive Committee to serve as the Board of Direction. The above Act of the Legislature of the State of New York was amended to allow twenty-six directors for the corporation.

The General Synod of 1993 and the General Synod of 1994 authorized the members of the General Synod Council to serve as the Board of Directors. The above Act of the Legislature of the State of New York was amended to allow sixty-two directors for the corporation.

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The Council and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey on November 30, 1825, passed an Act to enable the General Synod to take, hold and convey real estate in that state.

The Legislature of the State of Michigan in 1863 passed an Act to enable the General Synod to "have, receive, hold and enjoy by gift, grant, purchase, devise or legal or equitable form of conveyance"...real estate for educational purposes.

Citations to the Book of Church Order

When citing the *Book of Church Order* in other works, authors are encouraged to do so as follows:

Initial citation: RCA *Book of Church Order* (*BCO*), Chapter __, Part __, Article __, Section __ ([year] edition, p. __).

Subsequent citations: *BCO* Chapter __, Part __, Article __, Section __ ([year] edition, p. __).

CHAPTER 1
THE GOVERNMENT

Part I

The Consistory

Article 1. Definitions

Sec. 1. A consistory is the governing body of a local church. Its members are the installed minister/s of that church serving under a call, the elders and deacons currently installed in office, and commissioned pastors authorized by the middle assembly. (See Chapter 1, Part II, Article 17, Section 4.) A consistory is a permanent, continuing body that functions between stated sessions through committees. An organizing church has a middle assembly–appointed governing body that functions similarly to both a consistory and a board of elders. For purposes of Formulary No. 15, a member church is an organizing church, a local church, or a collegiate church.

a. A congregation is a body of baptized Christians meeting regularly in a particular place of worship.

b. An organizing church is a congregation that has a middle assembly–appointed governing body and has not yet been organized as a local church.

c. A local church is a congregation properly organized, which is served and governed by a regularly constituted consistory.

d. A collegiate church is two or more congregations served and governed by a single consistory, constituting one church organization.

e. A multiple parish is a group of local churches sharing the services of one or more installed ministers.

Sec. 2. A consistory combines the ministerial functions and governmental powers of the offices of the minister, elder, and deacon in the service and supervision of a local church. The whole body acts as the representative of the congregation. The elders, together with the minister/s, constitute a board of elders with specified responsibilities and powers. The deacons constitute a board of deacons with specified duties and authority.

Sec. 3. Ministers are those men and women who have been inducted into the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament by ordination in accordance with

the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America. Ministers of Word and Sacrament are equal in authority as ministers and as stewards of the mysteries of God. Ministers shall ordinarily be confessing members of the Reformed Church in America. No person who has relinquished the ministry for which installed or commissioned or who has been suspended or deposed from the ministry shall exercise that office.

Sec. 4. The Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament is one of servanthood and service representing Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. Ministers are called to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the ministry of the Word of God.

a. A minister serving a congregation is a pastor and teacher of the congregation to build up and equip the whole church for its ministry in the world. The minister preaches and teaches the Word of God, administers the sacraments under the authority of the consistory, shares responsibility with the elders and deacons and members of the congregation for their mutual Christian growth, exercises Christian love and discipline in conjunction with the elders, and endeavors that everything in the church be done in a proper and orderly way. As pastor and teacher the minister so serves and lives among the congregation that together they become wholly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ in the service of the church for the world.

b. A specialized minister is a pastor and teacher of the people among whom the minister works, to build up and equip those people, and to serve with the whole church in its ministry in the world. The specialized minister proclaims the Word of God in word and deed and administers the sacraments when appropriate under the authority of the middle assembly. The minister so serves and lives among the people that together they become wholly devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ in the service of the church for the world.

c. Proper ecclesiastical designation of ministers shall accord with the nature of their ministry, such as pastor, teacher, professor, missionary, chaplain, president, executive secretary, director, or other appropriate designation.

Sec. 5. Elders are confessing members of the local church who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God

and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 6. The office of the elder is one of servanthood and service representing Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. In the local church elders are chosen members of spiritual discernment, exemplary life, charitable spirit, and wisdom grounded in God's Word. Elders, together with the installed minister/s serving under a call and/or commissioned pastor/s (if any), are to have supervision of the church entrusted to them. They are set apart for a ministry of watchful and responsible care for all matters relating to the welfare and good order of the church. They are to study God's Word, to oversee the household of faith, to encourage spiritual growth, to maintain loving discipline, and to provide for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. They have oversight over the conduct of the members of the congregation and seek to bring that conduct into conformity with the Word of God, thereby empowering all members to live out their Christian vocation in the world. Elders exercise an oversight over the conduct of one another, and of the deacons, and of the minister/s. They make certain that what is preached and taught is in accord with the Holy Scripture. They assist the minister/s with their good counsel and in the task of visitation. They seek to guard the sacraments of the church from being profaned. An elder may administer the sacraments, if authorized by the board of elders.

Sec. 7. Deacons are confessing members of the local church who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 8. The office of the deacon is one of servanthood and service representing Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. In the local church deacons are chosen members of spiritual commitment, exemplary life, compassionate spirit, and sound judgment, who are set apart for a ministry of mercy, service, and outreach. They are to receive the contributions of the congregation and to distribute them under the direction of the consistory. The deacons give particular attention and care to the whole benevolence program of the church. They have charge of all gifts contributed for the benefit of the poor and distribute them with discretion. They visit and comfort those in material need and perform such other duties as the consistory may assign them.

Sec. 9. A great consistory of a church consists of all confessing members of that church who have served it, or are serving it, as elders and deacons on its consistory. The great consistory may be convened by the consistory when

matters of special importance relating to the welfare of the church demand consideration. Members of the great consistory have only an advisory voice.

Article 2. Responsibilities of the Consistory

Sec. 1. The consistory shall regularly consider, in consultation with its middle assembly and its partners in mission, the nature and extent of the ministry of the congregation in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the local community and the world. 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, middle assemblies, and the General Synod.

Sec. 2. The consistory shall act in all matters calling for judgment and decision that are not specifically assigned to the board of elders or to the board of deacons.

Sec. 3. The consistory shall provide a minister, or ministers, for the church. It has the authority to call persons to the ministry of the church if the charter of the church has not made other provisions. The consistory shall endeavor to learn the mind of the congregation with respect to any person who may be called to the ministry of the church. The judgment of the congregation in such matters shall be considered to be of significant weight, but not binding. The instrument of the call to a minister shall be signed by the members of the consistory. (For the form of the call to a minister, see Appendix, Formulary No. 5.) If the call is approved by the middle assembly and accepted by the person called, the latter's name shall be published in the church on three successive Sundays, so that opportunity may be afforded for the raising of lawful objections. (For organizing churches, the middle assembly may waive the three successive Sundays requirement.) If no such objections are raised, the middle assembly or its committee shall install the minister according to the order for installation in the Liturgy.

Sec. 4. A consistory may call a minister of a Christian church that the General Synod has declared to be in full communion with the Reformed Church in America. The middle assembly shall install the minister according to the order for installation in the Liturgy but the minister shall not subscribe to the declaration. The minister shall be a member of the middle assembly for the period of the call.

Sec. 5. A consistory may call one or more associate ministers. The form of the call to an associate minister shall be the same as that to the senior minister, except that the word "associate" shall be inserted before the words "pastor" or "minister," wherever they occur in the text of the call. The associate minister shall be a member of the consistory. (On the "assistant minister," see Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 8.)

Sec. 6. A consistory that calls more than one minister to serve the congregation shall issue a separate call to each minister.

Sec. 7. A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract unless (a) the middle assembly determines that the minister is serving the church part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory be exempt from this requirement, or (b) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

Sec. 8. A consistory may contract with one or more assistant ministers to serve along with its minister(s) serving under a call. The contract(s) shall follow the guidelines established by the middle assembly. The assistant minister may be commissioned by the middle assembly as a minister under contract, but shall not be *ipso facto* a member of the church or the consistory.

Sec. 9. A consistory or its minister may request the middle assembly to terminate the minister's relationship to that church. (See Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 8.) A consistory or its commissioned pastor may request the middle assembly to terminate the commissioned pastor's commissioning to that church.

Sec. 10. The consistory shall provide services of worship and other activities and organizations in the church's life for the spiritual benefit and growth of Christ's people.

Sec. 11. The consistory shall be guided by the following requirements in their provision of services of worship:

a. The order of worship on the Lord's Day shall be in accordance with the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America, or with the principles set forth in the *Directory for Worship*, as the consistory may direct for the

edification and profit of the congregation.

b. The sacrament of baptism shall be administered, if possible, at a time and place of public worship. "The Order for the Administration of Baptism" shall be read.

c. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper shall be administered, if possible, at least once every three months in every church. "The Office for the Administration of the Lord's Supper" or a liturgy approved by General Synod for occasional use shall be read. All baptized Christians present who are admitted to the Lord's Supper are to be invited to participate.

d. The hymns used in public worship shall be in harmony with the Standards of the Reformed Church in America.

e. Ordinarily, the preaching of the Word shall be performed by a Minister of Word and Sacrament, a commissioned pastor under contract with the congregation, a preaching elder under contract with the congregation, or a candidate for ministry appointed pursuant to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 7.

    1. A consistory or a governing body may issue an invitation to preach to a minister of another denomination whose character and standard is known.

    2. A consistory or governing body may determine whether to issue an invitation to preach to a minister whose character and standard is not known to them once that minister has first furnished the consistory or governing body with written evidence of recent date of that minister's good ministerial standing and the minister's authorization to preach the Word.

    3. A consistory or a governing body may authorize, in occasional or special circumstances, other persons to preach.

f. The points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism and Belhar Confession shall be explained by the minister at regular services of worship on the Lord's Day, so that the exposition of them is completed within a period of four years.

Sec. 12. The consistory shall make provision for the private administration of the sacraments in instances of sickness or other emergency. At least one elder shall be present with the minister on such occasions. At least one other elder shall accompany an elder administering the sacraments privately.

Sec. 13. The consistory shall have the care and supervision of the church's property and financial interests. They are the trustees of the church's property, unless the act of incorporation of the church, or the statutes of the state or province in which the church is incorporated, make other provision. The consistory shall not sell, transfer, lease, mortgage or otherwise alienate or encumber any real property of the church on which there stands a building designed for worship or religious instruction, or as a residence for the minister, unless the approval of the middle assembly with jurisdiction over the church has been secured. Further, the consistory shall not incur a total indebtedness that exceeds two-thirds of the prior year's expenditures for congregational purposes, as reported to the General Synod, without the approval of the middle assembly.

Sec. 14. The consistory shall be guided by the following requirements in its supervision of the election of elders and deacons to membership in the consistory:

a. The elders and deacons shall be chosen from the confessing members of the church in full communion who have attained the age of twenty-one years or, at the discretion of the consistory, eighteen years. They shall be elected by a vote of the confessing members of the church.

b. Notice of a congregational meeting for the election of elders and deacons shall be made in the usual place of worship on two Sundays preceding the date of such meeting. When an election has been omitted at its usual time, the consistory shall designate another time for that purpose, at an early date. They shall furnish notice of the meeting in the usual way.

c. Elders and deacons in churches already organized shall be chosen by one of the following methods:

    1. A double number of candidates shall be nominated by the consistory.

2. The confessing members of the congregation shall nominate and choose the whole number to be elected with or without advisory nominations by the consistory or other representatives of the congregation.

3. The method approved by the church's charter.

4. The method approved by the church's bylaws, subject to approval by the middle assembly.

d. The method employed by a church shall not be changed except by permission of the middle assembly.

e. The elders and deacons shall be elected for a term not to exceed five years, the length of the term being at the discretion of the consistory. A middle assembly may, under extenuating circumstances and at the request of a consistory, grant permission for an extension of the term of office of elders and deacons, subject to middle assembly review at least once every five years.

f. When a vacancy is to be filled, a person may be elected and installed to serve the remainder of the unexpired term; or the consistory may appoint and install a member of the great consistory to the same office of his or her previous service until the next congregational meeting for the election of elders and deacons.

g. In order to avoid an entire change of consistory at one time, a part of the whole number of elders and deacons shall be elected annually.

h. When a consistory is enlarged, a part of the whole number of elders and deacons to be added shall be elected annually.

Sec. 15. The names of the persons elected as elders and deacons shall be published in the church on three successive Sundays preceding their installation, in order that any legitimate objections may be presented to the board of elders for its judgment.

Sec. 16. Elders and deacons may be re-elected, but they shall not be reordained to the same office. They need be reinstalled only when the terms of service are not consecutive.

Sec. 17. A consistory shall recognize as valid only such ordination to the office of elder or deacon in another denomination as is able to meet the following conditions: intended to be within and to the ministry of the catholic or universal church; performed by a duly organized body of Christian churches, and by the authority within such body charged with the exercise of this specific power, accompanied by prayer and the laying on of hands.

Sec. 18. The president and the clerk of the consistory shall keep a careful register of all baptisms and marriages, of all admissions to confessing membership, of all dismissions to other churches, and of the deaths of members.

Sec. 19. The consistory shall make an annual statistical report to the General Synod. 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.

Article 3. Officers of the Consistory

Sec. 1. The consistory shall elect one of its ministers serving under call to be president of the consistory who shall preside at all of its meetings except where otherwise provided. 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. The consistory shall elect one of the elders to the office of vice-president. If there is more than one installed minister serving under a call the consistory may elect the associate minister/s to the office of vice-president in addition to the elder vice-president. The order of seniority of the several vice-presidents shall then be determined.

Sec. 3. The consistory shall have a clerk whose duty shall be to keep a faithful record of all the proceedings of that body, and to furnish official notices in writing to all persons directly affected by decisions of the assembly.

Sec. 4. The consistory may select a number of its members to supervise the administrative or personnel responsibilities of the consistory. That body may act without the approval of the full consistory if permitted by that consistory's rules of order.

Article 4. Transaction of Business

Sec. 1. The consistory 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. Elders and deacons have an equal voice.

Sec. 2. A majority of the consistory members regularly convened shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Sec. 3. All consistory meetings shall include Scripture and shall begin and end with prayer.

Sec. 4. A member of the consistory 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 to the middle assembly. Any member of the consistory shall also have the right to request that the names of all consistory members, with their votes for or against a matter in question, be recorded in the minutes of the consistory for the information of all; however, that request may be denied by a two-thirds majority of the consistory.

Sec. 5. A consistory regularly convened may invite a minister of its own middle assembly to preside at any meeting of the consistory when, in its judgment, circumstances make the presiding of its minister inadvisable.

Sec. 6. The president shall call special meetings of the consistory when they are deemed necessary and shall do so promptly when requested by at least three members of the consistory.

Sec. 7. The consistory shall submit the minutes of its meetings to the middle assembly whenever the middle assembly shall require it.

Article 5. Responsibilities of the Board of Elders

Sec. 1. The board of elders shall meet at stated times at least four times a year for the transaction of business that is their particular responsibility. A majority of the board regularly convened shall constitute a quorum. The minister shall preside at all meetings except where otherwise provided. The meetings shall begin and end with prayer. Minutes of meetings shall be kept and shall be submitted to the middle assembly at least once a year.

Sec. 2. The board of elders shall be guided in its supervision of the membership of the church by the following requirements:

a. It shall pass upon the qualifications of those who desire to make profession of faith. It alone has authority to admit persons to membership and to transfer members to other churches. It shall consider requests for infant baptism, providing at least one parent or guardian is a confessing member of the church to which the request is presented. A request for baptism from a parent or guardian who is not a confessing member of the church to which the request is made shall first be submitted for approval to the governing body of the church where the parent or guardian has membership.

b. It shall receive as confessing members of the church only those persons who have made a profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before the board of elders, or who have made a reaffirmation of a previous profession of faith, or who have presented a satisfactory certificate of transfer from another Christian church.

c. It shall publish to the church the names of persons received as members and enter them on the church roll.

d. It shall place on the inactive list the name of any confessing member whose relationship with the church has ceased for one year or who for one year has not made faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the use of the Lord's Supper, unless there are extenuating circumstances making such faithful use impossible. After making due effort to notify the member of such action, the board shall seek diligently for an additional period of one year to recover that member. If there is no renewal of an active connection with the church in spite of these efforts, the board may vote to strike the name of the member from the church membership. Due effort shall be made to notify the member of the action.

e. It shall seek to impress upon members of the church who move from the bounds of its ministry the duty of obtaining a certificate of transfer to another church.

f. It may permit a confessing member of a congregation or middle assembly of the Reformed Church in America who is serving as a

missionary outside of the United States or Canada to hold membership also in an indigenous church.

g. It shall remove from the church roll the name of the following members: one who has transferred to another church; one who has united with another church without securing a certificate of transfer; one whose membership has been terminated by a procedure of discipline; one who has had a prolonged inactive status; a deceased member; and that of a licensed ministerial candidate upon becoming the installed minister of another church.

Sec. 3. At each regular meeting, the board of elders shall seek to determine whether any members of the congregation are:

a. in need of special care regarding their spiritual condition and/or

b. are not making faithful use of the means of grace, i.e., attending worship and participating in the sacraments and shall provide the means of extending Christian ministry to such persons.

Sec. 4. The board of elders shall exercise Christian discipline with respect to any who continue in sin without repentance. All members of the church are subject to the church's government and discipline as administered by the board of elders. The board of elders shall admonish, or rebuke, or, if necessary, suspend from the privilege of the Lord's table any who should be so disciplined. It shall be the privilege of the board of elders to receive the penitent into the fellowship of the church again.

Sec. 5. The board of elders shall be guided in its exercise of Christian discipline by the requirements stated in the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures.

Article 6. Responsibilities of the Board of Deacons

Sec. 1. The board of deacons shall consist of those deacons who are in active service. The number of deacons shall be determined by the needs of the congregation and the evident gifts of those being called by God for the ministry of mercy, service, and outreach.

Sec. 2. The board of deacons shall serve those in distress and need. The

deacons shall minister to the sick, the poor, the hurt, and the helpless, shall aid the victims of the world's abuse, and shall express the social concerns of the church. They shall oversee and carry out their work as those concerned with the redemption of humankind. Their focus is turned toward service and ministry both to the world and in the church.

Sec. 3. The board of deacons shall keep minutes of its meetings when it meets at stated times for the carrying out of its ministry. A majority of the deacons regularly convened shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The meetings shall begin and end with prayer. The board shall render an account in consistory of its ministry, including its collection and distribution of the benevolence contributions of the congregation.

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 middle assembly.

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 middle assembly 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 middle assembly 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.

Article 8. Federated Churches

Sec. 1. A church of the Reformed Church in America may unite with one or more non-Reformed churches to form a federated church. The federated church shall be one religious corporation, with each of the original churches retaining its own religious corporation.

Sec. 2. The middle assembly shall oversee the formation of the federation. The federation shall receive approval of the respective authorities of the other churches involved. The middle assembly shall require that the following provisions be included in the incorporation and the bylaws of the federated church.

a. The continued existence of the Reformed church as a religious corporation.

b. The designation of a body within the federated church to act as trustees of the Reformed religious corporation.

c. The agreement to a common doctrine, liturgy, and government that honors the traditions of the Reformed Church in America.

d. The agreement that when the constitutions of the churches involved differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the governing body of the federated church shall petition the assemblies (judicatories) of immediate jurisdiction to overture their respective highest courts to resolve the conflict.

e. The freedom of the federated church to call its ministers from any communion comprising the federation that it sees fit.

f. The agreement that each minister shall be subject to the discipline of the communion to which he or she is accountable and that he or she agrees to honor the confessions, liturgy, government, and discipline of the other communions.

g. The designation of which body shall exercise discipline and shall have authority over the administration of the sacraments.

Sec. 3. Complaints against the actions of the ruling body may be taken under constitutional provisions of only one communion, according to the choice of the complainant, and once a complaint is filed with one judicatory, no other communion shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.

Sec. 4. Appeals from the judicial actions of the board of elders (or its equivalent) shall be made to only one judicatory 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 all parties, including the board of elders (or its equivalent), and on members.

Sec. 5. A federated church may be dissolved by a two-thirds vote of the congregation at two separate congregational meetings, held not more than one year and not less than ninety days apart, subject to the concurrence of the ecclesiastical authority of the communions involved. In case of dissolution of a federated church, property that was brought to the federation shall be distributed to each constituent body. All property, real and personal, acquired after the federation shall be divided according to a formula established upon federation among the constituent bodies of the communions involved in the federation.

Article 9. Affiliated Churches

Sec. 1. A consistory or governing body, with approval of its congregation and middle assembly, may affiliate with another denomination with which the Reformed Church in America has an agreement for the orderly exchange of ministers. A consistory or governing body that affiliates with another denomination remains subject to the provisions of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America, including those regarding representation at higher assemblies. Any obligation of the consistory to pay assessments to the middle assembly is not reduced by virtue of affiliation with another denomination, unless otherwise approved by its middle assembly.

Sec. 2. The governing body of a church from a denomination with which the Reformed Church in America has an agreement for the orderly exchange of ministers may affiliate with a middle assembly of the Reformed Church in America upon approval of its congregation, the receiving middle assembly, and the affiliating church's current denomination/s.

a. Ministers and elder delegates from an affiliating church shall have the privilege of the floor. The receiving middle assembly may grant voting privileges at the middle assembly level but they may not participate in higher assemblies.

b. The number of elder delegates from an affiliating church shall be determined as provided in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 3.

c. The affiliating church and the receiving middle assembly may agree upon the method for calculating the affiliating church's assessments.

d. A minister of an affiliating church shall remain subject to the discipline of the minister's denomination.

e. A church that affiliates with the Reformed Church in America remains subject to the governance of its current denomination, unless it is otherwise agreed.

Part II
The Middle Assembly

Article 1. Middle Assembly Defined

Sec. 1. The middle assembly is an assembly and judicatory consisting of all the enrolled ministers of that body, commissioned pastors serving under a commission approved by the middle assembly, and the elder delegates who represent all the local and organizing churches within its bounds. The middle assembly is a permanent, continuing body that functions between stated sessions through committees. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates, those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction of or with the approval of the middle assembly, and commissioned pastors serving under a commission approved by the middle assembly.

Sec. 2. A middle assembly may retain its designation as a classis or a regional or particular synod for its legal documents.

Article 2. Responsibilities of the Middle Assembly

Sec. 1. The middle assembly, in consultation with its congregations and its partners in mission, shall regularly consider the nature and extent of ministry within middle assembly bounds in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the world within which the middle assembly ministers. The middle assembly 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 middle assemblies, consistories, or the General Synod. The ministries of the middle assembly shall strive to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socio economic diversity found within the middle assembly bounds.

Sec. 2. The middle assembly shall exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers, its commissioned pastors, and over the interests and concerns of the congregations within its bounds, and shall enforce the requirements of the Government of the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 3. The middle assembly 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 middle assembly exercises this power either by actions of the

entire body or by actions of its properly constituted judicial commission.

Sec. 4. The middle assembly shall form, dissolve, and disband churches, and shall form or dissolve combinations of two or more churches.

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

Sec. 6. The middle assembly shall have the authority to receive under its jurisdiction as a local church, any congregation signifying such desire.

Sec. 7. The middle assembly shall exercise a general supervision over all candidates for ministry subject to its jurisdiction.

Sec. 8. The middle assembly shall examine candidates for ministry throughout their training process and prior to granting a certificate of licensure. The middle assembly shall examine candidates for commissioned pastor throughout their training process and/or prior to commissioning.

Sec. 9. The middle assembly shall ordain, install, commission, transfer, suspend, depose, declare demitted, declare inactive, and declare retired ministers.

Sec. 10. The middle assembly shall approve and disapprove calls and contracts, and effect and dissolve the relationship between ministers and churches or congregations. The middle assembly shall approve and disapprove contracts, and effect and dissolve the relationship between commissioned pastors and churches or congregations.

Sec. 11. The middle assembly shall exercise all ecclesiastical functions in accord with the Government of the Reformed Church in America that are not specifically delegated to other assemblies.

Article 3. Elder Delegates

Sec. 1.

a. A church shall not have more than four elder delegates. A church with three hundred or fewer confessing members shall have one elder delegate. A church with more than three hundred confessing members shall also have one elder delegate for each additional three hundred confessing members or fraction thereof, up to a maximum of three additional delegates.

b. A church without an installed minister or a commissioned pastor appointed by the middle assembly 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 allotted in subsection (a).

c. A collegiate church shall have at least one elder delegate for each of its constituent congregations.

Sec. 2. The congregations in a multiple parish may take turns in sending to the middle assembly one or more additional elder delegates so that the number of minister and elder delegates from the multiple parish is at least twice the number of such congregations.

Sec. 3. The elder delegate to the middle assembly shall be chosen from the entire body of elders in a church, whether or not presently a member of the board of elders.

Sec. 4. The elder delegate shall be a member of the middle assembly from the date of election or appointment and shall continue in that responsibility to the middle assembly until the effective date of election or appointment of a successor. If, however, confessing membership in the church represented shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the delegate shall cease to be a member of the middle assembly.

Article 4. Sessions of the Middle Assembly

Sec. 1. Stated sessions of the middle assembly shall be held at least annually at such times as the middle assembly may determine. All sessions of the middle assembly shall begin and end with prayer. There shall be a sermon preached,

or a devotional service, or both, at each stated session. 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 middle assembly is required.

Sec. 2. The president of the middle assembly shall call a special session of the middle assembly whenever special business requires it or upon the written request of two middle assembly members and two elder delegates. At least ten days' notice of any special session shall be given to all the members and elder delegates of the middle assembly. The notice shall state the purpose of the special session. The presence of three middle assembly members and three elder delegates shall constitute a quorum to transact the business stated in the notice of such special session.

Article 5. Officers of the Middle Assembly

Sec. 1. The president shall preside at sessions of the middle assembly. 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. The middle assembly 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 who are directly affected by judicial decisions of the middle assembly. The clerk shall also be responsible for forwarding to the denominational archives the minutes of the middle assembly and subsidiary corporations, all papers pertaining to disbanded churches, and all papers of the middle assembly should the middle assembly disband.

Article 6. Transaction of Business

Sec. 1. The middle assembly 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 middle assembly shall be incorporated.

Sec. 2. A member of the middle assembly 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. Any member of the middle assembly shall also have the right to request that the names of all middle assembly members, with their

votes for or against a matter in question, be recorded in the minutes of the middle assembly for the information of all; however, that request may be denied by a two-thirds majority of the middle assembly.

Sec. 3. Only duly accredited delegates to the middle assembly shall be entitled to vote.

Sec. 4. Except as otherwise provided in the *Book of Church Order*, a member of a middle assembly committee, commission, or board shall be a member of the middle assembly or a confessing member of one of its churches or congregations.

Sec. 5. The privilege of the floor shall be extended to Associates in Ministry under the supervision of the middle assembly, provided, however, that they shall have no vote.

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

Article 7. Superintendence of the Local and Organizing Churches

Sec. 1. The middle assembly 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 the middle assembly for the information of the General Synod:

a. Are the doctrines of the gospel preached in your church in conformity with
   1. the Word of God?
   2. the Standards of the Reformed Church in America?

b. Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism and Belhar Confession explained in your congregation as required by Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11f of the *Book of Church Order*?

c. Does your congregation regularly engage the principles of the Belhar Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of the Synod of Dort, and Belgic Confession?

d. Has your consistory or governing body considered the nature and extent of the ministry of the congregation in accordance with Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 1 of the *Book of Church Order*?

e. Is your congregation engaged in significant, regular activities that faithfully witness to the gospel and that encourage others to respond to God's Spirit in commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

f. Does your congregation contribute annually and significantly in its prayers, gifts, and service to the mission of the Reformed Church in America?

g. Does the consistory or governing body provide for worship, including the celebration of the sacraments, in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 11 of the *Book of Church Order*?

h. Does the consistory or governing body regularly review the activities of the church in order that the congregation and those whom it serves may become more faithful in their walk as disciples of the Lord Jesus?

i. Is the education of the young people in the essential truths of the Word of God faithfully attended to in your congregation?

j. Has the consistory or governing body prayerfully considered persons within the congregation, particularly young people, in order to identify with them their spiritual gifts, especially the gift for ministry of Word and sacrament; to encourage the development of these gifts; and to pray for those individuals on a regular basis?

k. Does the board of elders fulfill its responsibilities of supervision and discipline as set forth in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5 of the *Book of Church Order*?

l. Does the board of deacons fulfill its responsibilities in mercy, service, and outreach as set forth in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 6 of the *Book of Church Order*?

m. Does the consistory or governing body regularly engage its minister/s and/or commissioned pastor/s in a mutual reflection on the ministerial needs and challenges of the congregation?

n. Do the salary, housing, arrangements for professional development, and all other benefits received by the minister/s and/or commissioned pastor/s meet the terms of the original call or contract, subsequent revisions thereof, and the minimum standards of the middle assembly?

Sec. 2. The middle assembly shall offer guidance to a congregation for the purpose of the continuation of pastoral functions when the installed minister is absent for a period of more than two months due to illness, sabbatical, or other reasons.

Sec. 3. The middle assembly shall appoint a minister or elder as supervisor of all proceedings of the consistory of a church without an installed minister. If the minister or elder to be appointed as supervisor is a member of another middle assembly, then the middle assembly shall consult with the other middle assembly prior to making such appointment. The middle assembly shall determine the appropriate training and responsibilities for the supervisor.

Sec. 4. The middle assembly, at the request of a church or with its consent, shall appoint one of its ministers or a minister of another middle assembly, or of another approved body, the minister under contract of a church that is without an installed minister. The appointment shall be for a term of not more than one year. It shall be subject to renewal after proper review by the middle assembly. The minister under contract shall perform the duties and receive the financial support that is agreed upon and shall report to the middle assembly whenever that body shall require it.

Sec. 5. The middle assembly shall determine whether a minister under contract who is also a member of the middle assembly shall be appointed supervisor of the church served. The minister under contract shall preside at meetings of the consistory of the church if invited by the consistory to do so, but shall not have the right to vote.

Sec. 6. The middle assembly, at the request of a church or with its consent, may appoint a specialized transition minister to serve that church between installed ministers, subject to the provisions of Sections 4 and 5, provided the minister has been endorsed as qualified by the General Synod or its designated agent.

Sec. 7. The middle assembly may appoint a candidate enrolled in the Certificate of Readiness for Examination process to a church without an

installed minister or minister under contract, to furnish the service for which the candidate is qualified. Before the appointment is made, the candidate must secure the approval of the General Synod agent supervising the candidate's Certificate of Readiness for Examination process.

Sec. 8. A consistory or governing body shall not enter into a contract with a minister, a licensed candidate, or a candidate for the Certificate of Readiness for Examination except by approval of the middle assembly. Between sessions of the middle assembly the approval may be given by the president and the clerk of the middle assembly.

Sec. 9. The approval of the middle assembly shall be required before a consistory or governing body and a competent minister, or ministers, may contract for the purpose of maintaining public worship, under that consistory's or governing body's direction, in a place or pulpit in any locality, or provide assistance for its own installed minister/s. In such cases a formal call is not required, though the middle assembly shall review all contracts annually. Ministers employed by such contracts may or may not be required to be members of the middle assembly.

Sec. 10. The approval of the middle assembly shall be required for two or more churches to call a minister to serve them jointly. This relationship may be approved only if the ordination meets the requirements of the Government of the Reformed Church in America, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 1. This relationship shall be terminated only by action of the middle assembly. The right to vote shall be granted to a minister of another denomination serving a Reformed church under the above conditions if the right to vote is reciprocated under the same conditions.

Article 8. Organizing a Church

Sec. 1. Pursuant to Chapter 1, Part II, Article 2, Section 4, a middle assembly shall regularly consider the ministry of starting new churches. It may consult its constituent consistories in so doing. Furthermore, it may form or designate such entities as it deems appropriate for the formation of new congregations.

Sec. 2. The middle assembly shall form a transitional governing body of a new congregation that shall administer the affairs of that congregation. Similarly to a consistory, the governing body shall conform to the laws of the state or province and the proscriptions within the *Book of Church Order*.

a. When a governing body has been appointed by the middle assembly, the congregation is then an "organizing church" as defined in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 1, Section 1b. The middle assembly shall appoint successors to the governing body as needed and when needed.

b. When appointing a governing body the middle assembly shall provide elders to oversee the administration of the sacraments and to admit persons as members of that organizing church.

c. The governing body shall administer the membership of that organizing church under the authority of the middle assembly, until such time as the organizing church shall be organized as a local church.

Sec. 3. A Minister of Word and Sacrament, commissioned pastor, preaching elder, or other person acting as pastor of an organizing church shall be under the supervision of the middle assembly and shall be subject to its discipline as set forth in the *Book of Church Order*. A written contract approved by the middle assembly shall be provided for each person so employed. The middle assembly shall review these employment contracts annually.

Sec. 4. When an organizing church petitions to become a local church, the middle assembly shall

a. Approve the membership roster of the church as proposed by the governing body.

b. Approve the selection of a consistory, and the election process for successors.

c. Determine that the organizational document of the church includes a provision substantially in the form of Appendix, Formulary No. 15.

d. Extend a call to the pastor who will then be installed or commissioned at the organizational service.

Sec. 5. Notice of the time and place of the proposed organization, of the ordination/installation of elders and deacons, and the installation/commissioning of a pastor shall be published in the organizing church's usual place of worship on more than one occasion.

a. The ordination of elders and deacons shall occur at a public worship service using an approved liturgy.

b. At the first meeting of the consistory following upon their installation, the first elders and deacons of a newly organized church shall determine by lot each member's length of term of service so that the provisions of Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 14g are met.

Sec. 6. When an organizing church is initiated by a middle assembly not within the middle assembly's own geographic area, the initiating middle assembly shall receive the permission of the middle assembly in which it intends to initiate its ministry. Since a middle assembly 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 of the middle assembly to which it is geographically most proximate within a period of ten years from the date of its first gathering for worship. However, both middle assemblies, acting in the best interest of the new congregation, may approve the transfer of the congregation at any time.

Article 9. Superseding a Consistory

Sec. 1. The middle assembly shall have the authority to supersede a consistory in the administration of a local church when, in its judgment, there are conditions in that church that make it unable to fulfill the functions of a local church as these are defined by the middle assembly. Such conditions shall include at least one of the following:

a. Failure to hold regularly scheduled Sunday services.

b. Absence of a quorum of a governing body as prescribed by the constitution, bylaws, or rules of order of the church, for a period of three months.

c. Lack of a governing body.

d. Danger of loss of property by reason of foreclosure or otherwise.

e. Financial irregularities or improprieties, including, but not limited to, the improper use of church funds.

f. Neglect of the physical condition of the church properties.

g. Insufficiency of confessing membership to fulfill the purposes and responsibilities of an organized church.

h. Long-term or rapid decline in participation or membership.

i. Inability to provide adequate ministerial services.

j. The consistory requests supersession.

Sec. 2. Before superseding a consistory, the middle assembly shall notify the consistory and the ministers (if any) of its intention and summon the consistory to show cause why that consistory should not be dissolved and the church and its property be administered under the direction and supervision of the middle assembly. If the basis for supersession is the request of the consistory, the consistory need not show cause why it should not be dissolved and may instead advise the middle assembly of its approval of this action.

Sec. 3. The notice required by Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 2 shall include the following:

a. The basis upon which the middle assembly is seeking supersession, with specific reference to a condition found in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9, Section 1.

b. Notice that the action of supersession causes the termination of the ministerial relationship.

c. The time, date, and location of the middle assembly meeting where supersession shall be considered.

d. A statement that the consistory must appear at the meeting and show cause why it should not be dissolved.

Sec. 4. After having heard the consistory, the middle assembly may act to supersede the consistory. A decision to supersede requires a two-thirds vote at a stated or special session where a quorum that meets the requirements for a stated session of the middle assembly is present. In combination with a decision to supersede or thereafter, the middle assembly may also elect,

in accordance with the laws of the state or province in which that church is located, to:

a. Terminate whatever authority the consistory or any other body has as trustees of the church property.

b. Take the church under its direction by appointing such trustees as are required for the protection, preservation, management, and ownership of the property during such time as the middle assembly shall determine.

Sec. 5.

a. When a consistory is superseded, the consistory is dissolved and any ministerial relationships of that church are terminated. The middle assembly shall take such steps as may be necessary to bring that church, its ministry, and its property under the direct administration of the middle assembly.

b. The middle assembly shall designate persons, not necessarily members of that church, who, in lieu of the consistory, shall exercise the functions of a consistory or a board of elders or a board of deacons as may be necessary for the administration of the church. These persons shall serve the church in the same capacity as a consistory until such time as the life of the church has reached an end or a consistory for the church is reconstituted. The supersession board is authorized to carry out the responsibilities of Chapter 1, Part I, Articles 2, 5, and 6, without further acts of the middle assembly. In carrying out these responsibilities, the supersession board shall follow the requirements of Chapter 1, Part I, Article 4. The middle assembly may grant additional authority to the supersession board or may impose restrictions on the authority automatically granted to the supersession board.

Sec. 6. The middle assembly shall have the authority to reconstitute the consistory of a church when, in the judgment of the middle assembly, sufficient growth has been achieved or suitable stability created so that the church can continue ministry without middle assembly administration. The middle assembly shall guide the consistory selection process (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 14). The decision to reconstitute the consistory requires a two-thirds vote at a stated or special session where a quorum that meets the requirements for a stated session of the middle assembly is present.

Article 10. Disbanding or Transferring a Church

Sec. 1. Whenever a church is disbanded and the corporation or other legal entity through which its consistory functions is dissolved, all real and personal property shall thereupon become vested in the middle assembly with jurisdiction over the church, upon the assumption by the middle assembly of all that church's outstanding obligations, provided the laws of the state or province in which the church is located do not prohibit this procedure. If the middle assembly is not legally capable of owning real property, all such real and personal property shall become vested in the next higher assembly legally capable of owning real property, upon the assumption by that assembly of all outstanding obligations of the church. The assumption of obligations shall be limited to the value of such property.

Sec. 2. If the corporation or other legal entity through which a consistory functions is dissolved, as a part of such dissolution process the middle assembly shall be satisfied that each and all of the following conditions have been fulfilled:

a. The sale, transfer, or other disposition of all physical properties of the church.

b. The transfer of all financial assets to the middle assembly, and the assumption by the middle assembly of all financial liabilities of the church and of all organizations within it to the extent of the value of such assets.

c. The presentation to the middle assembly of all formal church records, and all other records and documents in its possession.

d. The determination of the membership status of all persons affiliated with the church, followed by a determination of the process for transfer or other disposition of the memberships.

Sec. 3. The middle assembly shall have the authority to transfer a local church to another denomination, together with all or part of its real and personal property, at such time as it has been demonstrated to the satisfaction of the middle assembly that:

a. such church can no longer function effectively in its present relationship;

b. the effectiveness of such congregation as a local church could be enhanced if it were to affiliate with another denomination;

c. the denomination with which it desires to affiliate furnishes written evidence that the church in question would be able to exercise a more effective ministry under its jurisdiction, and that if such church were to be transferred to its jurisdiction, it would be received without reservation as a church having all the rights and privileges of any of its churches.

Sec. 4. Application for leave to withdraw from the denomination for the purpose of affiliating with another denomination shall be made by written petition of the consistory filed with the stated clerk of the middle assembly. Said petition shall state that the applicant church proposes to withdraw from the denomination, and, if such be the case, take with it all or part of its real and personal property free from any claim of the Reformed Church in America, or any assembly, board, or agency thereof.

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

b. The middle assembly committee shall meet with the congregation, with the consistory of the church, and with representatives of the denomination with which the church desires to affiliate. The committee shall endeavor to ascertain the basic facts and conditions underlying the petition, endeavor to reconcile any differences of opinion within the congregation and between the church and the denomination, explore the advantages and disadvantages of a withdrawal and the needs of both the church and the denomination, and endeavor to ascertain how Christ's Kingdom may best be served in the matter.

c. The committee shall endeavor to ascertain the will of the congregation at a meeting held pursuant to the following formalities:

1. Notice of the calling of a special meeting of the congregation, stating the time, place, and purpose of the meeting, shall be read from the pulpit on two successive Sundays at all regular worship services, beginning at least ten days prior to the date set for

the meeting. A copy of the notice shall also be mailed to each confessing member of the church at least ten days prior to the date of the meeting.

2. The meeting shall be held at the usual place of worship of the congregation, at a suitable hour.

3. Only confessing members eligible to vote for election of elders and deacons shall be entitled to vote at the meeting. Proxy voting shall not be permitted.

4. There shall be opportunity given for presentation of all sides of the issue, after which the presiding officer shall allow time for discussion. Thereafter there shall be a secret ballot on the questions of withdrawal. Tellers shall count the ballots and report the number of each in favor, the number of each opposed, and the number of each unmarked or otherwise declared by the tellers to be invalid. Certification of such figures shall be made at the meeting by the presiding officer and the clerk. The certification shall state further the number of members eligible to vote and the number present at the meeting.

5. All of the ballots, together with the tally sheet signed by the tellers, a copy of the notice of the meeting, a statement of the reading and mailing of the notice, and the certification of the results of the balloting, shall be personally delivered or sent by registered mail to the chairperson of the middle assembly committee.

d. The committee shall file its report with the stated clerk of the middle assembly within six months after its appointment, setting forth its findings and recommendations. Such report shall be submitted to the middle assembly at a stated or a special session held within sixty days after receipt of the report by the stated clerk.

e. Any of the foregoing limitations of time may be extended by agreement between the committee and the consistory.

f. If the middle assembly shall then determine that it is in the best interest of Christ's Kingdom that the church be allowed to withdraw from the denomination, and to retain all or part of its real and personal property

free from any claim on the part of the denomination or any assembly, board or agency thereof, it shall then so declare and proceed promptly to assist the consistory of the church in (1) dissolution of the relationship of the church to the denomination, and (2) transfer of its property to a church of another denomination.

g. If the middle assembly shall determine that the church should not be allowed to withdraw from the denomination, the church may institute new proceedings after the lapse of one year from the denial of the original petition.

h. Any complaint by the church, or by any other aggrieved party, against the decision of the middle assembly on a petition for leave to withdraw from the denomination, shall be submitted to the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business.

Sec. 5. The interest of the denomination in the property of a church withdrawing from the denomination shall not be completely divested therefrom until the church shall have:

a. repaid to the denomination or appropriate assembly, board, or agency thereof, all money that the church has previously borrowed therefrom and promised to repay, unless specifically released or compromised by agreement of the parties;

b. taken such action as is necessary to release the denomination or any assembly, board, or agency thereof, from any secondary or contingent liability of the church and from any guarantee of payment by the church;

c. paid all accrued assessments, whether or not due and payable at the date of approval by the middle assembly of the petition for a withdrawal, as well as the required contribution to the RCA retirement plan for the minister/s of the church;

d. provided not less than six months' severance salary and housing to any minister of the church who elects to remain with the denomination, and who is not during such period receiving salary and housing from another church or agency of the denomination, or in connection with any other employment;

e. taken appropriate action to notify the general public that the church is no longer affiliated with the denomination.

Sec. 6. In no event shall the property of a church that has withdrawn from the denomination, or the proceeds of sale of any such property, become the property of individual members of the church, so as to be capable of being divided among them; nor may the property or the proceeds of sale thereof be devoted to any but a church-related use. In the event of dissolution of such a church within a period of five years after the middle assembly shall have approved a petition for withdrawal from the denomination, such property, both real and personal, or the proceeds of sale of such property, shall be conveyed, transferred or delivered to the middle assembly from which the right of withdrawal was received.

Sec. 7. The middle assembly, in exercising its authority to receive a congregation as a local church of the Reformed Church in America, shall first satisfy itself that:

a. such congregation truly desires to organize and function as a local church in accordance with and in all respects subject to, the provisions of the Government of the Reformed Church in America.

b. such congregation has satisfied all prerequisites required by the denomination, if any, with which it has been affiliated, for withdrawing from the jurisdiction of that denomination;

c. such congregation could function more effectively as a local church of the Reformed Church in America, and would be welcomed as such by the other churches of the middle assembly; and

d. such congregation has adopted an organizational document that includes a provision substantially in the form of Appendix, Formulary No. 15.

Article 11. Supervision of Candidates for Ministry

Sec. 1. A confessing member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who desires to become a minister shall apply to the middle assembly with jurisdiction over the church in which membership is held to be enrolled as a candidate for ministry. This application shall be made through the consistory of the church in which membership is held.

Sec. 2. Upon the consistory's recommendation, the candidate shall appear in person before the middle assembly or its committee for examination. The middle assembly or its committee shall inquire into the applicant's character and behavior; physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and educational qualifications; and the motives that led the applicant to seek the ministry as a vocation. If the middle assembly is satisfied by the examination, the applicant shall be received under its care and enrolled as a candidate for ministry.

Sec. 3. Immediately following the enrollment of a candidate for ministry, the middle assembly, through its stated clerk, shall petition the General Synod on behalf of the candidate for a Certificate of Readiness for Examination. Such a petition must be received a minimum of twenty-four months prior to the time it is to be given final disposition by the General Synod through its agent (the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency). However, in instances where completion of theological training takes place prior to the required period of twenty-four months, the middle assembly may petition the appropriate agent of the General Synod to substitute a period of ministry supervised by the General Synod agent for all or part of its twenty-four-month requirement. The agent shall report its actions to the next General Synod.

Sec. 4. The candidate shall be under the supervision of the middle assembly while in seminary, but shall remain subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the board of elders of the church in which membership is held. The middle assembly shall show a continuing sympathetic interest by appointing a committee for each candidate to guide the candidate's study program and practical training.

Sec. 5. If the candidate's membership is transferred to a church under the jurisdiction of another middle assembly, enrollment shall likewise be transferred to that middle assembly. However, upon completion of seminary training, the candidate shall be examined for licensure and ordination by the middle assembly in which church membership was held upon entering seminary studies, unless in the judgment of said middle assembly it is appropriate for examination for licensure and ordination to be administered by the middle assembly in which the candidate is presently enrolled. The approval of both middle assemblies shall be required to permit the middle assembly in which the candidate is enrolled to administer the examinations.

Sec. 6. As the candidate pursues theological education, the middle assembly

shall satisfy itself that the candidate exhibits (1) appropriate character and call to the ministry of Word and sacrament; (2) comprehension of Scripture and of the history, theology, and church order of the Reformed Church in America; (3) requisite skills in interpretation and proclamation of Scripture, including sufficient Greek and Hebrew to understand nuances of the biblical text; (4) competence for ministry; (5) commitment to the unity of the church, the ministry of all Christians, and the proclamation of the gospel.

Sec. 7. After the candidate has been granted a Certificate of Readiness for Examination, the middle assembly shall examine the candidate for licensure and ordination, satisfying itself that the candidate is (1) competent in and committed to the Constitution (the Standards, the Government and Disciplinary Procedures, and the Liturgy) of the Reformed Church in America; (2) sound in doctrine; (3) sound in understanding and administration of the sacraments; and (4) knowledgeable about the history of the Reformed Church and committed to its mission.

Sec. 8. Provided the middle assembly is satisfied with the candidate's progress toward ordination, in consultation with the appropriate agent of the General Synod, the middle assembly shall grant to the candidate each year a provisional license to preach. The provisional license granted prior to the final year of the candidate's program shall also give the candidate the right to receive the promise of a call.

Sec. 9. The candidate shall receive the degree of Master of Divinity or an academically equivalent degree upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies.

Article 12. Certificates of Readiness for Examination

Sec. 1. Candidates at Seminaries Officially Related to the Reformed Church in America

A Master of Divinity degree from a seminary officially related to the Reformed Church in America will serve as a Certificate of Readiness for Examination. A candidate for ministry who has received such a degree that includes course work satisfying the requirements for ministry of Word and sacrament as defined in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 7, as documented on the candidate's transcript, is entitled to an examination for licensure and ordination.

Sec. 2. Candidates at Seminaries Not Officially Related to the Reformed Church in America

a. A candidate for ministry who has received the degree of Master of Divinity or equivalent degree from a seminary not officially related to the Reformed Church in America upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies addressing the requirements for ministry of Word and Sacrament as defined by Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 7, shall receive from the General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency a Certificate of Readiness for Examination.

b. The General Synod through the board of trustees of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall require the applicant to furnish, at the conclusion of seminary studies, the following: a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency; a transcript of the applicant's academic record at this seminary; and evidence of confessing membership in a Reformed church of the middle assembly making petition.

Sec. 3. Transfer Between Agents

If a candidate desires to come under the jurisdiction of a different theological agent of the General Synod during the process, the middle assembly in which the candidate is enrolled shall notify both parties on behalf of the candidate. Further supervision and/or examination of the applicant shall only be carried out by or with the consent of the theological agent in whose program the candidate had previously been enrolled.

Sec. 4. Alternate Means to Satisfying Requirements

A candidate for ministry who is a student enrolled in a Master of Divinity degree program at a theological seminary and who, because of age, lack of necessary academic preparation, or other sufficient reason, finds it too difficult to meet the full requirements for the Certificate of Readiness for Examination, shall make application to the middle assembly.

a. If the middle assembly finds the reason sufficient, it shall petition the

appropriate agent of the General Synod (the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency) on behalf of the applicant for approval of an alternate means to meet any part of the requirements for the Certificate of Readiness for Examination.

b. The agent of the General Synod shall consider carefully the reasons submitted by the middle assembly as to why the applicant is unable to meet the full requirements for a Certificate of Readiness for Examination. If the agent finds the reason sufficient, it shall provide a means for the applicant to compensate for the inability to meet the requirement. If the application is rejected, the agent shall state its reasons. If the agent finds that the compensatory steps have been satisfactorily completed, it shall judge that the requirement has been fulfilled.

c. The agent shall report its actions to the next General Synod.

Sec. 5. The Approved Alternate Route

A candidate for ministry who has not received the degree of Master of Divinity or a degree that is its equivalent from a seminary that is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools or by a theological accrediting agency of comparable standards as determined by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency may qualify for the Certificate of Readiness for Examination provided the following conditions are met:

a. A consistory shall recommend an individual as a candidate and the middle assembly shall assess the candidate's call, gifts, and experience in accordance with the standards requisite for the ministry of Word and sacrament.

b. The middle assembly shall determine: (1) the candidate has at least five years' ministry experience that prepares the candidate for leadership as a Minister of Word and Sacrament; (2) the candidate gives evidence of the call, gifts, and experience for the ministry of Word and sacrament; and (3) the candidate, for compelling practical reasons, cannot complete a Master of Divinity degree at an accredited seminary.

c. The middle assembly shall petition for a Certificate of Readiness for Examination on behalf of the candidate to the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency. If that agency rejects the petition, it shall clearly

state its reasons. The middle assembly may reapply.

d. Upon admission, the middle assembly and the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall together develop a program that will allow the candidate to satisfy the requirements for the Certificate of Readiness for Examination.

e. When the candidate has completed the program, the candidate shall be examined for the Certificate of Readiness for Examination by the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency. The method of assessment shall be culturally and linguistically appropriate.

f. When the candidate passes the examination, the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency may award the Certificate of Readiness for Examination.

Article 13. Supervision of Licensure and Ordination

Sec. 1. Upon middle assembly approval of an examination for licensure and ordination, the candidate shall sign the *Declaration for Licensed Candidates* (Appendix, Formulary No. 1) and shall be given a license to preach the gospel. The license shall be signed by the president and stated clerk of the examining middle assembly, shall be issued for a period of five years, and shall be subject to renewal by that middle assembly. The license may be revoked by that middle assembly at any time on request of the candidate, or for due cause.

Sec. 2. The licensed candidate for ministry shall remain under the immediate direction of the examining middle assembly. The candidate shall visit such congregations and preach in such places as the middle assembly may designate. If such direction is not given, the candidate may accept an invitation to preach in any church, but is not permitted to administer the sacraments.

Sec. 3. The licensed candidate for ministry shall not be a minister delegate to any ecclesiastical assembly or judicatory, but may be elected an elder delegate to such bodies.

Sec. 4. The candidate shall be ordained to the office of minister by the middle assembly only after the candidate has received and accepted a call

or other invitation to a form of ministry that meets all of the following requirements:

a. A ministry that requires a theological education for its performance.

b. Performed under the jurisdiction or with the approval of a middle assembly of the Reformed Church in America.

c. Intended to witness to the Word in the world or to nurture and train Christians for their ministry in the world.

Sec. 5. The middle assembly shall appoint a time for the ordination service of the candidate. An interval of at least ten days following the candidate's examination is required before the service of ordination. That service shall be conducted by the middle assembly in stated or special session with proper solemnity. A sermon suitable to the occasion shall be preached, and the promises, directions, explanations of duty, and prayer with the laying on of hands shall be according to the office for ordination in the Liturgy. A certificate of ordination (Appendix, Formulary No. 4), signed by the president and the stated clerk of the middle assembly, shall be given and the minister so ordained shall be enrolled as a member of the middle assembly.

Sec. 6. A licensed candidate who seeks ordination in a middle assembly other than the middle assembly with jurisdiction over the candidate's church shall request a Certificate of Transfer (Formulary No. 17) as a licensed candidate to that middle assembly. The transfer shall be granted if the candidate is in good standing. When the candidate is received under care by signing the Declaration for Licensed Candidates, the receiving middle assembly shall notify the sending middle assembly.

Sec. 7. A calling middle assembly may, at its discretion, examine a licensed candidate before considering approval of a call to that candidate.

Article 14. Reception of Ministers and Licensed Candidates from Other Denominations

Sec. 1. A middle assembly shall recognize as valid only such ordination in another denomination as is able to meet the following conditions: intended to be within and to the ministry of the catholic or universal church; performed by a duly organized body of Christian churches, and by the authority within

such body charged with the exercise of this power, accompanied by prayer and the laying on of hands.

Sec. 2. A middle assembly shall not receive any licensed candidate or minister under its care from any body of professing Christians that maintains doctrines opposed to those of the Standards of the Reformed Church in America, unless that licensed candidate or minister shall make a complete and explicit declaration in writing renouncing such doctrines as being contrary to the Standards.

Sec. 3. When an application is made for admission to the middle assembly by a licensed candidate or a minister from another denomination, the middle assembly shall consider only an applicant who has satisfied educational requirements that are equivalent to those required in the Reformed Church in America, and it shall subject the applicant to such examination before the middle assembly as shall demonstrate the applicant's understanding of the theology, history, government, and disciplinary procedures of the Reformed Church in America; understanding of and adherence to the Standards of the Reformed Church in America; and loyalty to its agencies.

Sec. 4. When an ordained minister of another denomination wishes to apply for admission to the middle assembly, that minister shall furnish the middle assembly with the following or the equivalent:

a. a written statement from the body holding the minister's credentials attesting that the minister is an ordained minister in good and regular standing;

b. a completed Minister's Profile form;

c. copies of academic degrees;

d. a seminary transcript;

e. names, addresses, and telephone numbers of five persons who are qualified to comment on the applicant's ministry;

f. a statement from the applicant that attests to knowledge of Reformed Church history, readiness to adhere to the Standards of the RCA, and a basic knowledge of and readiness to support Reformed Church agencies and institutions.

Sec. 5. An ordained minister from another denomination may seek to receive preliminary approval to candidate with RCA congregations.

a. Prior to becoming a serious candidate for a call from a congregation in the Reformed Church in America, an ordained minister who is affiliated with another denomination shall meet with the appropriate committee of a Reformed Church middle assembly, which shall determine whether, in its judgment, the minister is able to meet the requirements set forth in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Sections 1, 2, 3, and 4. The committee's judgment, whether positive or negative, shall be sent by the stated clerk to the Office of Ministry Services for attachment to the applicant's Minister's Profile form and such distribution as may be appropriate.

b. If the committee's judgment is negative, the middle assembly may appoint one or more of its ministers to assist the applicant in preparation for a second meeting with the middle assembly committee, which shall take place not less than six months after the initial meeting. The committee may also require additional formal study prior to a second meeting.

c. When an ordained minister who is affiliated with another denomination has met with a middle assembly committee in order to determine whether the minister is qualified to be considered for a call to a Reformed church, and the committee is not satisfied with the minister's qualifications, any subsequent meetings for the same purpose shall take place within the same middle assembly, unless the middle assembly specifically requests another middle assembly to act on its behalf.

d. When a middle assembly is requested to approve a call to a minister who is affiliated with another denomination, prior to its examination of the applicant it shall obtain full information from the chairperson of the committee that reviewed the applicant's qualifications, as outlined in a, b, and c above.

Sec. 6. A licensed candidate from another denomination shall not be ordained as a minister before serving in a supervised ministry for a period of up to twenty-four months. The middle assembly shall petition the General Synod to provide this superintendence through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, which will

determine the length of the period of supervision.

Article 15. Supervision of Ministers of Word and Sacrament

Sec. 1. A middle assembly within the geographic area of service in which a minister serves in an RCA congregation or in a specialized ministry shall be the middle assembly in which membership is held and, as such, shall be responsible for the installation or commissioning and supervision of that minister with the following exceptions:

a. If a minister is serving two or more churches in different middle assemblies, the middle assembly nearest the place of the minister's residence shall be the middle assembly in which the minister's membership is held, and the minister shall be installed as a minister of the church in that middle assembly; the status in the other church or churches shall be that of minister under contract. This minister may be commissioned by the middle assembly that approved the contract.

b. If a minister is serving in a specialized ministry in an area within the continental United States or Canada not now governed by an RCA middle assembly, the middle assembly nearest the area of service shall be the middle assembly in that the minister's membership shall be retained.

c. If a minister is serving in a specialized ministry outside the continental United States or Canada, the minister's membership shall be retained in the middle assembly in which membership is held.

d. If a minister is serving as a missionary, a specialized transition minister, or a chaplain within an organization that includes various assignment possibilities, i.e., military bases, VA hospitals, etc., the minister's membership shall be retained in the middle assembly in which membership is held.

e. If a minister is serving a united church, the middle assembly in which the minister's membership is held shall be determined by Chapter 1, Part I, Article 7, Section 2k.

Sec. 2. The middle assembly in which a minister's membership is held is the only middle assembly to which the minister is amenable.

Sec. 3. The middle assembly shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled minister and the minister's immediate family. Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the middle assembly deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the middle assembly annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The middle assembly shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its ministers serving in congregations or employed by an assembly, institution, or agency of the Reformed Church in America under call or contract, unless (a) the middle assembly determines that the minister is serving the church or other assembly, institution, or agency part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory or employing assembly, institution, or agency be exempt from this requirement, or (b) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

Sec. 4. The middle assembly shall install only those ministers who serve under a call. The middle assembly may commission ministers under contract or specialized ministers, if deemed appropriate.

a. All ministers shall be responsible to a middle assembly that shall oversee their function as pertains to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament (see also Section 2 and Section 6 in Article 15).

b. When ministers move from one middle assembly to another, they shall sign the formulary *Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament* (Appendix, Formulary No. 3) in the middle assembly that they join.

Sec. 5.

a. The middle assembly shall designate a minister to serve as a mentor to guide, counsel, and model the learning and developmental processes of each newly ordained minister or, where deemed appropriate by the middle assembly, a minister received from another denomination. The middle assembly shall consult with the newly ordained minister in designating a mentor.

b. The middle assembly shall ensure that all enrolled ministers actively serving under its jurisdiction are adequately trained to serve fruitfully in the urban, suburban, rural, and/or tribal areas to which they are assigned.

Sec. 6. A Minister of Word and Sacrament who is installed as a pastor of a local church shall be a member of that church by virtue of installation. A minister not installed as a pastor shall become a member of a local church. A minister who is ordained and installed as an elder or deacon remains amenable to the middle assembly except in respect to the minister's conduct in exercising the responsibilities of the board of elders or the board of deacons. Such a minister shall not represent that church as an elder delegate to the middle assembly or the General Synod.

Sec. 7. A minister of the middle assembly shall superintend the proceedings of a consistory when a call is being issued to a minister. When completed, a call must be presented by the consistory to the middle assembly, which shall approve the call before it is presented to the minister called. If no legitimate objection is offered, the minister shall be installed by the middle assembly or its committee according to the office for installation in the Liturgy.

Sec. 8. When the termination of an installed minister's relationship to a church is in view, a minister of the middle assembly having jurisdiction shall be invited by the church to be present at a meeting of the consistory for the purpose of superintending the application for such action. The supervising minister shall attest such application and shall deliver it to the middle assembly with a written report (Appendix, Formulary No. 8). The latter shall serve as the basis upon which the action of the middle assembly shall be made. If either the minister or the consistory shall not join in the application, that fact shall be plainly stated in the report. In such case no termination of the relationship shall be made by the middle assembly until a hearing of both minister and consistory has been conducted in open middle assembly. The president of the middle assembly shall give ten days' notice of such hearing to both parties. The warrant for the notice and for the call of the middle assembly shall be the report of the supervising minister. A vote for the termination of the minister's relationship to a church shall be by two-thirds of the members of the middle assembly present.

Sec. 9. A minister who moves from the bounds of one middle assembly into another shall request a Certificate of Transfer (Formulary No. 9) from the middle assembly where membership is held. The Certificate shall be presented prior to the approval of the minister for reception into the new middle assembly. That middle assembly shall notify the sending middle assembly when a minister is received.

Sec. 10. When a minister of a church has attained the age of seventy years,

the ministerial relationship to that church shall be terminated. The middle assembly shall terminate the relationship at a special session, or not later than the next stated session. The middle assembly shall then appoint a supervisor over the church, unless other contractual relations approved by the middle assembly are in effect. Those who reach the age of seventy years may continue to be employed by contract. The contract shall be for no more than twelve months and any renewal shall be subject to approval by consistory and middle assembly. Retired ministers may be commissioned to a form of ministry.

Sec. 11.

a. The term "minister emeritus" is an honorary title, and it does not confer on its holder any obligations, rights, or privileges.

b. A consistory may, with the approval of its middle assembly, declare to be minister emeritus a former minister of its congregation.

Sec. 12. The middle assembly shall keep a permanent record in which the declarations for licensed candidates, commissioned pastors, and ministers are clearly written. Those who are received on examination or on certificate shall subscribe to the proper declaration in the presence of the middle assembly.

Sec. 13.

a. A minister may voluntarily relinquish the office by demission, but only after application to, and with the consent of, the middle assembly of which the minister is a member. The middle assembly, having fulfilled its pastoral responsibility insofar as feasible, may declare the person to have demitted the office of minister and, if so declared, shall remove the name of the member from the roll of the middle assembly. A request from a minister to transfer to another denomination is an application for demission, which, following the middle assembly's consent, shall be deemed effective upon reception by the other denomination.

b. A minister who because of ill health, incapacity, lack of opportunity, or other reason deemed sufficient by the middle assembly, has not functioned in that office for a period of six months may be declared inactive by the middle assembly. When a minister has not functioned in that office due to lack of opportunity, the middle assembly shall

first use its best efforts to provide an opportunity for preaching and/or teaching the Word and administering the sacraments before declaring the minister inactive. This declaration shall be reviewed by the middle assembly semi-annually. Should an inactive minister be capable of resuming the duties and functions of a minister and decline to make satisfactory efforts to do so and also decline to relinquish the office by demission, the middle assembly may proceed with the presentation and trial of the charge of desertion of office, with the possibility of suspension or deposition from office.

c. A minister who attains the age of sixty years may, with the approval of the middle assembly, retire. A retired minister shall retain ordination and shall remain under the care and supervision of the middle assembly without being required to perform the duties and functions of a minister.

Sec. 14. A person who has been declared demitted from the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament may seek reordination to a form of ministry that meets the requirements of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 13, Section 4. The request shall be made to the middle assembly of membership at the time of demission, which shall have discretion as to whether the request for reordination be considered. If the middle assembly agrees to allow the request for reordination, the middle assembly shall conduct an examination.

Sec. 15. A minister of another denomination whose ordination meets the criteria of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 14, Section 1, whose good standing has been certified by that denomination, and who serves with the approval of the middle assembly as a minister under contract, an assistant minister, a minister in a cooperative specialized ministry in which the middle assembly shares sponsorship, or a minister to a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with the middle assembly, or an installed minister, may upon request and with the approval of the middle assembly, hold membership in the middle assembly. Such members shall have the rights and privileges of membership for the period of the approved service, but may not represent their middle assembly in the higher judicatories, assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Reformed Church in America.

Such members shall not subscribe to the declaration, but, in accepting membership, shall agree that in their duties approved by the middle assembly they will conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the declaration and accept the counsel and admonition of the middle assembly.

Article 16. Commissioning and Supervision of Preaching Elders

Sec. 1. A consistory or governing body may request the middle assembly to commission a preaching elder for that congregation. If a preaching elder is requested where there is no installed minister, the consistory shall demonstrate that its circumstances make the calling of an ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament impossible.

Sec. 2. A commissioned preaching elder shall be an ordained elder in the Reformed Church in America with gifts for preaching. If the elder is not serving on the active consistory and is commissioned to a regular preaching ministry in a church with no installed pastor, he or she shall meet regularly with the consistory for the duration of the commission.

Sec. 3. The middle assembly shall examine the candidate prior to commissioning as a preaching elder, in order to determine that the necessary gifts, knowledge, and skills are present. Such examination shall be based on a program of study in the following areas: (1) New Testament introduction and history, (2) Old Testament introduction and history, (3) biblical exegesis and interpretation, (4) sermon composition and delivery, (5) systematic theology, and (6) RCA doctrinal standards. The form and content of this program of study shall be approved by the middle assembly. The middle assembly may waive all or part of the program of study if the elder demonstrates that such study or its equivalent has already been completed. In no case, however, shall the middle assembly waive the examination.

Sec. 4. Preaching elders may be commissioned for up to two years. Representatives of the middle assembly shall conduct a service of commissioning in the church where the elder is commissioned to preach. The commission may be renewed after evaluation by the local consistory and the middle assembly. When the commissioned preaching elder is serving a church with no installed pastor, commissioning shall be renewed only when the calling of a Minister of Word and Sacrament continues to be impossible. The middle assembly shall arrange for regular and thorough supervision of commissioned preaching elders. The middle assembly shall revoke or refuse to renew a commission for a preaching elder if the middle assembly determines that the Word of God is not rightly proclaimed.

Sec. 5. Commissioning is only for preaching in a specific place designated by the middle assembly, under the supervision of the middle assembly

and the local consistory. Commissioning does not authorize the preaching elder to preach regularly in places not designated by the middle assembly, nor to assume the responsibilities of the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, except for the preaching of the Word. Commissioned preaching elders may serve as regular elder delegates if appointed by their consistory, or as nonvoting delegates to the middle assembly at the discretion of the middle assembly. In their preaching ministry they are amenable to the middle assembly through the commissioning and supervision process; in all other matters they participate in mutual oversight with the local consistory in the same way that all elders do.

Article 17. Commissioning and Supervision of Commissioned Pastors

Sec. 1. A commissioned pastor is an elder who is trained, commissioned, and supervised by a middle assembly for a specific ministry within that middle assembly and under the auspices of a local church or congregation that will include the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. The commission shall be valid for the period of assigned service.

Sec. 2. Preparation for Commissioning

a. A consistory or governing body may recommend a confessing member of a Reformed church to the middle assembly as a candidate to become a commissioned pastor.

b. Upon acceptance of the consistory's application on behalf of a candidate, the middle assembly shall approve and supervise a training plan for that person. The middle assembly shall satisfy itself that the candidate exhibits ministry competence in 1) maturity of faith, 2) personal integrity, 3) understanding of the Old and New Testaments and biblical interpretation, 4) Reformed theology, 5) church history, 6) knowledge of and adherence to the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America (the Government, the Standards, and the Liturgy), 7) nature and administration of the sacraments, 8) ability to preach, 9) capability to minister within the church, and 10) understanding of and adherence to pastoral ethics and practices.

c. In satisfying itself concerning a candidate's ministry competence, the middle assembly shall employ criteria established by the General Synod Council.

d. The middle assembly shall satisfy itself that the candidate is knowledgeable of and adequately trained to serve fruitfully in the urban, suburban, rural, and/or tribal areas to which they are to be commissioned.

Sec. 3. Confirming an Invitation to Ministry

a. Upon satisfaction by the middle assembly of the candidate's ministerial competence, the middle assembly shall confirm the specific form of commissioned service appropriate to the gifts and training of the candidate. When the middle assembly receives an invitation for a ministry from one of its local churches or congregations it deems appropriate for the candidate, and upon the candidate's acceptance of this invitation to ministry, the middle assembly shall 1) authorize the ministry, 2) approve a contract, and 3) commission the candidate to the authorized ministry to the extent of the contract. A church or congregation shall not enter into a contract with a commissioned pastor except by the approval of the middle assembly.

b. After a middle assembly approves a candidate for commission to an authorized ministry, the middle assembly shall appoint a time and place for a commissioning service at a stated or special session of the middle assembly. The service shall utilize a liturgy approved by the General Synod. The commissioned pastor shall read aloud and sign the Declaration for Commissioned Pastors (Appendix, Formulary No. 16) in the presence of the middle assembly as part of that order for commissioning. (See Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 12.)

c. The middle assembly shall assign a mentor for each commissioned pastor for the period of training and ministry.

Sec. 4. The Commissioned Pastor

a. The commissioned pastor shall be authorized to preach the Word and celebrate the sacraments. The middle assembly may authorize the commissioned pastor to any or all of the following functions:

    1. To serve as a member of consistory.

    2. Serve as presiding officer of the consistory at its request and may

be appointed supervisor of that consistory.

3. Preside at the ordination and installation of elders and deacons.

4. Perform a service of Christian marriage when approved by consistory and subject to state or provincial law.

b. The commissioned pastor shall be a member of the middle assembly during the period of commissioned service, and shall not serve as an elder delegate to the middle assembly from a local church. A commissioned pastor may serve as an elder delegate to the General Synod.

c. The middle assembly shall evaluate the performance of the commissioned pastor annually.

d. Upon completion of the authorized ministry by a commissioned pastor, the middle assembly shall provide to that person a written statement of the training received and the ministry that was performed.

e. The commissioned pastor shall remain a member of a local church, but is amenable solely to the discipline of the middle assembly as set forth in Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3 of the *Book of Church Order*, for the period of commissioned service.

f. The middle assembly in which a commissioned pastor's membership is held is the only middle assembly to which the commissioned pastor is amenable.

g. Upon request of the General Synod, the middle assembly shall submit to a review of the processes used by the middle assembly for commissioned pastor selection, preparation, commissioning, support, and supervision.

Article 18. Certification and Supervision of Associates in Ministry

The middle assembly shall be responsible for certifying those persons who meet the criteria approved by General Synod as Associates in Ministry and shall be responsible for the supervision of Associates in Ministry.

Article 19. Relation to the General Synod

Sec. 1. The middle assembly shall report annually to the General Synod upon the state of religion within the bounds of the middle assembly, and any statistics on the form prescribed by the General Synod.

Sec. 2. The middle assembly shall report to the 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.

Sec. 3. The middle assembly shall appoint delegates to the General Synod.

Part III

The General Synod

Article 1. General Synod Defined

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of one minister delegate and one elder delegate from each of the middle assemblies for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; up to 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 that functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

Article 2. Responsibilities of the General Synod

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall exercise a general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the whole church.

Sec. 2. The General Synod shall exercise an appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of the lower assemblies.

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

Sec. 4. The General Synod alone shall determine denominational policy. It may delegate the formulation of policy to committees, boards, or other agencies.

Sec. 5. The General Synod shall maintain a friendly correspondence and cooperative relationship with the highest judicatories or assemblies of other Christian denominations and with interdenominational agencies in all matters pertaining to the extension of the Kingdom of God.

Sec. 6. The General Synod shall be the legal custodian of the funds, devises, bequests and other property that is given, devised, or bequeathed directly to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, or to or for the use of its various unincorporated funds.

Sec. 7. The General Synod shall have original authority over all matters pertaining to doctrine and denominational polity as they relate to the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church.

Sec. 8. The General Synod shall exercise responsibility in the oversight of standards for the preparation of candidates for ministry of Word and sacrament.

Sec. 9. The General Synod shall from time to time institute, organize, and direct such agencies and boards as shall enable the church to fulfill the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to teach all nations and preach the gospel to every creature, and to conduct its missionary, educational, and benevolent work effectively.

Sec. 10. The General Synod shall recommend to the churches such methods as shall effectively sustain the denominational program, and the denomination's official periodical, and that tend to secure the largest dissemination of the gospel.

Sec. 11. The General Synod may cause corporations to be formed by any of the boards, institutions, or agencies under its jurisdiction, retaining original authority in matters of denominational polity. Such corporations shall be maintained according to the laws of the states where they are located, so that they may receive, hold, and transfer property, and facilitate the carrying out of the responsibilities committed to them.

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

Article 3. Delegates

Sec. 1. The delegate shall be a member of the General Synod from the date of election or appointment and shall continue in that responsibility to the General Synod until the effective date of election or appointment of a successor. If, however, ministerial membership in the middle assembly

represented or confessing membership in a church within the middle assembly represented shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the delegate shall cease to be a member of the General Synod.

Sec. 2. The elder delegate to the General Synod, or the elder who serves on committees, commissions, or boards of the General 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.

Sec. 3. If a delegate is unable to attend the General Synod to which appointed, the delegate shall notify the stated clerk of the sending assembly as soon as possible. Upon notification by the stated clerk, the alternate delegate shall assume the rights and responsibilities of the appointment.

Sec. 4. The delegates from the professorate of the Reformed Church in America shall be selected by the General Synod professors from their own number.

Sec. 5. The middle assembly may appoint as a delegate one of its members who is a missionary on home assignment at the time of General Synod. The missionary delegate shall not be counted as one of the regular delegates of that middle assembly and may serve as a missionary delegate only once every five years.

Sec. 6. An active duty military chaplain with at least five years in the military service shall be eligible for appointment as a delegate to the General Synod from the middle assembly of membership. A chaplain delegate shall be eligible once during each succeeding five year period and shall not be counted as one of the regular delegates of the middle assembly.

Sec. 7. The General Synod shall pay travel expenses to and from the synod's place of meeting according to the General Synod Council travel policy.

Article 4. Sessions and Meetings of General Synod

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall meet annually, either electronically or in person, with an in-person meeting occurring at least every third year, at such time and place as was either reported by the Executive Committee at a previous stated session or determined by the Committee on Emergencies. All meetings of the General Synod shall begin and end with prayer.

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 one minister and one elder from at least half of the middle assemblies, 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.

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 meeting of the General Synod.

Sec. 4. The General Synod shall celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper during each session of the synod, unless the synod shall direct otherwise. The synod shall further devote a period of time on the first day to prayer and praise. Each morning meeting of the synod shall have its first half-hour devoted to prayer and praise to God.

Article 5. Officers of the General Synod

Sec. 1. A president shall be elected from among the delegates to preside at the next session of the General Synod, and to undertake such other duties as may be assigned by the 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. It shall also be the duty of the president to present a report on the state of religion in the middle assemblies, and to make proposals for future action. The president shall be a member of the General Synod until the close of the next stated session of synod.

Sec. 2. After the president has been elected, the synod shall elect a vice-president from among the delegates. The vice-president shall be a member of the General Synod until the close of the next stated session of the synod.

Sec. 3. The General Synod shall have a general secretary whose duty shall be to present at each session of General Synod a report articulating a vision for the church, including recommendations for the future; to keep 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 general secretary shall also be responsible for forwarding to

the denominational archives minutes of the General Synod and subsidiary corporations, and shall undertake such other duties as may be assigned by the synod.

Article 6. Transaction of Business

The General Synod shall be guided in its transaction of business by such rules of order as it shall adopt from time to time, and that are in accord with the Government of the Reformed Church in America. The General Synod shall be incorporated.

Article 7. Committees, Boards, and Agencies of the General Synod

Sec. 1. The General Synod Council is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It shall act as the executive committee of the General Synod and it shall administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It shall implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies. It shall support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the several commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church.

Sec. 2. The custody of the funds, devises, bequests, and other property of the General Synod is exercised in behalf of the General Synod by its trustees, who are called the Board of Directors of the Corporation. The income or interest from funds shall be administered either by that board, or by such administrative agencies as the General Synod shall from time to time direct. Other boards and agencies of the church are not thereby precluded from receiving, exercising custody, or administering, under the general supervision of the General Synod, any funds, devises, bequests, and other property that is given, devised, or bequeathed directly to them.

Sec. 3. The constitution or enabling document of every agency, board, and institution officially related to the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, with its amendments, shall be approved by the General Synod.

Sec. 4. The members of all incorporated organizations, other than the colleges, shall be elected by the General Synod, or by those organizations upon nomination by the General Synod.

Sec. 5. The governing boards of all institutions of higher learning in the United States that 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.

Article 8. The Office of General Synod Professor

Sec. 1. The office of General Synod professor is to offer, collectively and individually, the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole, and to represent the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry.

Sec. 2. All active professors of the General Synod shall together constitute the professorate.

Sec. 3. The General Synod professor shall be a Minister of Word and Sacrament in good standing, sound in the faith, possessed of a recognized ability to teach, have the confidence of the churches, and shall have made recognized contributions to the church and to scholarship. When a Reformed Church minister who exhibits these qualifications exercises a substantial and continuing role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates for ordination and in the process of recommending the Certificate of Readiness for Examination, the board of trustees of an RCA seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board may nominate that minister to the General Synod as candidate for the office of General Synod professor. A General Synod professor shall be elected by the General Synod by a majority vote of the members present.

Sec. 4. When an election of a General Synod professor has been effected, the president of the General Synod shall authorize a service of installation for the newly elected professor. During the service of installation, the General Synod professor shall subscribe to the form of the *Declaration for a General Synod Professor* (Appendix, Formulary No. 7).

Sec. 5. A General Synod professor shall be amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but the professor will be subject to all the policies and procedures of employment or service established by the seminary boards or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

Sec. 6. A General Synod professor shall hold membership in the middle assembly of residence. The professor shall be amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but in every other matter is amenable to the middle assembly as a Minister of Word and Sacrament.

Sec. 7. A General Synod professor shall continue in office so long as he or she continues to exercise a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing RCA candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the Certificate of Readiness for Examination, or until death, resignation, dismissal from service by the seminary or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency, declaration by the General Synod as professor emeritus, or removal from office by the General Synod.

Sec. 8. When a General Synod professor resigns the office elected to by the General Synod or no longer exercises a substantial role, under the authority of one of the seminaries or the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency board, both in preparing candidates for ordination and in the process of granting the Certificate of Readiness for Examination, the professor shall either be removed from the office by a declarative act of the synod, or be declared professor emeritus by the synod. The appropriate middle assembly shall be notified of this action.

Sec. 9. The General Synod may remove a General Synod professor from that office if after due process and trial at either the General Synod or the middle assembly, the professor is no longer a minister in good standing in the middle assembly or is found by the General Synod to be unfit to fulfill the office. Any additional discipline is the sole responsibility of the middle assembly. The middle assembly shall notify the General Synod of any disciplinary action taken against a General Synod professor.

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall have power to make all rules and regulations necessary to put into effect any and all articles of the Government, the Disciplinary Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America.

Sec. 2.

a. Amendments to the Government, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship shall be made only upon adoption by the General Synod at a stated session, with recommendation to the middle assemblies for approval.

b. At least two-thirds of the middle assemblies shall approve a proposed amendment in order to secure its adoption. Only middle assemblies whose delegates were eligible to be seated at the General Synod at which the amendment was adopted are eligible to vote on the recommendation for approval.

c. If an amendment is approved by the middle assemblies, the General Synod, at its next stated session, may pass a final declarative resolution on the amendment at its discretion. When the declarative action has taken place, the amendment shall become effective.

CHAPTER 2
THE DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES

Part I

Judicatories

Article 1. Nature of Judicatories

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

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*.[2]

Sec. 3. Each middle assembly 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*.[3]

Sec. 4. Decisions made by the commission on judicial business appointed by the middle assembly may be appealed to the middle assembly as a whole. For purposes of this appeal, the middle assembly 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.[4]

Article 2. Composition of Judicatories

Sec. 1. The commission on judicial business appointed by a middle assembly 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.[5]

Sec. 2. All members of a commission on judicial business appointed by a middle assembly shall be an enrolled member of the middle assembly or an elder who is a member of one of the churches of the middle assembly. All members of the Commission on Judicial Business appointed by the General Synod shall be a member of a middle assembly or an elder from one of the local or organizing churches of the middle assembly.[6]

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 middle assembly 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 middle assembly 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 middle assembly or its executive committee.

Sec. 5. The term of service for regular members of a middle assembly commission on judicial business shall be three years. The middle assembly 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 middle assembly shall appoint a replacement member at its next regular meeting.

Sec. 6. The clerk of the middle assembly shall act as the clerk for its commission on judicial business, unless otherwise provided by the middle assembly. However, the clerk shall not be a member of the commission. A middle assembly 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.[7]

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.[8]

Sec. 2. For the commission on judicial business of the middle assembly, 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 presiding officer. 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.

Part II

Discipline

Article 1. Nature of Discipline

Sec. 1. Discipline is the exercise of the authority that 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. A judicatory may, in the judicial process, impose admonition or rebuke as a form of discipline.[9]

Article 2. Nature of Offenses

Sec. 1. The only matters to be considered as offenses subject to accusation are those that can be shown to be such from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America.[10]

Sec. 2. Offenses that 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.[11]

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.[12]

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 middle assembly, 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.[13]

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.[14]

Sec. 3. Discipline of a Commissioned Pastor

Elders who are serving in a middle assembly commission as a commissioned pastor are subject solely to the government and discipline of the middle assembly. 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 middle assembly 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 that 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 middle assembly immediately.[15]

c. The middle assembly 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.[16]

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 middle assembly 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 by the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business. The middle assembly 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 middle assembly.

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 panel shall hear the case, but shall render judgment only on matters of doctrine. In all other cases, the panel shall either dismiss the charge or, if appropriate, remand the charge for consideration by the middle assembly in which the General Synod professor holds membership as a Minister of Word and Sacrament.

b. 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 middle assembly 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 full Commission on Judicial Business.[17]

Sec. 6. Discipline of a Consistory

Consistories are under the care of the middle assembly and are subject to its government and discipline. A middle assembly commission on judicial business has the authority, after trial, to suspend a consistory accused of unfaithfulness to duty, or of disobedience to the middle assembly, 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 middle assembly has removed the disqualification. The middle assembly 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.[18]

Article 4. Procedure for Bringing a Charge

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.[19]

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.[20]

Sec. 3. A committee designated by the responsible judicatory may also bring a charge.[21]

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:[22]

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 agreed-upon resolution must be approved by the appropriate judicatory.[23]

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.[24]

Sec. 7. The action of the committee shall be reported to the judicatory.[25]

Article 5. Trying a Charge[26]

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 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.[27]

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.[28]

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.[29]

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.

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.[30]

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.

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.[31]

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.[32]

Sec. 11. Procedural Rules

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 accuser shall be responsible for moving forward with the evidence. [33]

d. The charge(s) must be proven with a high degree of probability.[34]

e. 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.

f. 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.[35]

g. 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.[36]

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 middle assembly level, either the professor or the middle assembly may request a panel of the General Synod Commission on Judicial Business to hear the case.

b. A panel of the Commission on Judicial Business shall determine whether there is sufficient merit to the accusation that it be heard.

c. If the charge goes forward, it shall be heard by a panel of the Commission on Judicial Business.

d. The burden of proof shall be on the accuser, who is responsible for moving the charge forward.

e. The accused shall have the right of cross-examination of adverse witnesses.

f. 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.

g. Either party may invite expert witnesses to testify on their behalf. Each party shall have the right to place questions to any expert witnesses.

h. The panel of the Commission on Judicial Business shall state its reasons for its decision.

i. Should the charge be sustained, the panel of the Commission on Judicial Business shall impose discipline.

Sec. 13. Decision by a Board of Elders[37]

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 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.[38]

b. The judicatory shall record its actions, stating the reasons. Official notification shall be provided to the parties within thirty 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.[39]

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 that 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 that 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.[40]

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.[41]

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:

a. In the event of a complaint against a consistory or its officer, the complaint is filed with the clerk of the middle assembly that has immediate superintendence of the consistory.[42]

b. In the event of a complaint against a middle assembly 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.[43]

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.[44]

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 that 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.[45]

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.[46]

Sec. 4. The clerk of the higher judicatory shall, upon receiving the record, promptly notify its judicial business commission, call a meeting of the commission at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The commission shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The commission shall promptly advise the parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The commission may request further written response or arguments to be submitted within the

same twenty days.[47]

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the commission shall then consider its merits. If the complaint is deemed to be frivolous, dilatory, or clearly without merit, the commission may dismiss the complaint without a hearing. If the complaint goes forward, the 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 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 commission may declare the case to be defaulted.[48]

Sec. 6. 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 thirty days of the decision.[49]

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 another judicatory.[50]

Sec. 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.[51]

Sec. 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.[52]

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

Part 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.[53]

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. 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.[54]

Sec. 4. Notice of intent to appeal suspends the judgment of the lower judicatory until the appeal is finally decided. But when the judgment that 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 full middle assembly 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 middle assembly commission on judicial business. The full General Synod Commission on Judicial Business shall be the final court of appeal for all other matters.

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 that 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 the higher judicatory, call a meeting of the judicatory at a suitable time and place, and give notice of such meeting to all the parties involved. The judicatory shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The judicatory shall promptly advise the parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The judicatory may request further written response or arguments.[55]

Sec. 5. A General Synod professor 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 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 full Commission shall determine whether the case and its attendant papers are in order. The Commission shall promptly advise the parties if it finds any irregularities. A period of not more than twenty days shall be allowed to correct such irregularities. The Commission may request further written

responses or arguments.

Sec. 6. If the case is in proper order, the 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 commission may dismiss the appeal without a hearing. If the appeal goes forward, the 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 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.[56]

Sec. 7. 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.[57]

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 EXPLANATORY NOTES ON CHAPTER 2: THE DISCIPLINARY AND JUDICIAL PROCEDURES

These notes are provided to assist in the interpretation of the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures. They are explanatory in nature and do not have constitutional authority. They are considered "advisory opinions" provided by the Commission on Church Order. The notes have been fully revised to accompany the 2026 edition of the *Book of Church Order*.

Part I Judicatories

1 The board of elders, the middle assembly, and the General Synod exercise judicial as well as legislative powers. When those bodies exercise judicial powers they are judicatories, and at all other times the governmental unit is known as an assembly. (*BCO*, *Preamble*, p. 1.) Different rules apply when an assembly becomes a judicatory.

2 The board of elders has wide-ranging responsibility for the spiritual health of the members of the church and their participation within the community of faith. The board of elders exercises formal discipline when members "continue in sin without repentance," which suggests that the elders have taken previous steps to intervene with pastoral discipline (admonishment and rebuke). (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Sections 3-4)

3 Notice the use of "commission" rather than "committee" to distinguish the body appointed by the middle assembly and General Synod to conduct judicial business from the investigative committee that is appointed when a charge is filed. (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part II, Article 4)

4 The full Commission includes all those who were nominated by the middle assemblies and elected by the General Synod to serve on the Judicial Business Commission.

5 A middle assembly should consider the size of the quorum for its judicatory and the fact that those appointed to serve on its judicial business commission and the investigative committee may not vote on the decision appealed to the whole judicatory. (*BCO*, Chapter 2, Part IV, Article 2, Sec. 8)

6 Enrolled members of the middle assembly include the enrolled Ministers of Word and Sacrament and commissioned pastors serving under the supervision of the middle assembly. (*BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 1)

7 Alternate members are appointed from the membership of the full Commission who were nominated by the middle assemblies and elected by the General Synod to serve on the Commission.

8 For example, the presiding officer may rule on those permitted to testify at the trial and may exclude any evidence if the officer determines that admitting such evidence would be fundamentally unfair. As it applies to proceedings in front of a panel of the General Synod CJB, the entire commission refers to all the members of the panel appointed to hear the case.

Part II Discipline

9 The exercise of discipline may begin informally. The body that faithfully exercises informal discipline may never have to resort to Chapter 2 of the *Book of Church Order*. A middle assembly may engage in discipline through its executive committee or an investigative committee appointed to consider an accusation. However, only admonition and rebuke may

be imposed without implementing the provisions of Chapter 2, Part II of the *BCO* as a formal judicatory. When a judicatory conducts a trial, Robert's Rules of Order do not apply. Instead, the administrative rules in Chapter 2, Part 1 (Judicatories) and Part II (Discipline) are used.

[10] Guidelines for dealing with accusations of sexual harassment are found the Report of the General Synod Council's Ministry and Personnel Services for Guidelines and Procedures for Dealing with Allegations of Sexual Misconduct in the *Minutes of the General Synod 1994*, pp. 237-39.

[11] The procedure outlined in Matthew 18:15-17 does not apply for all offenses. Under certain circumstances, it may be difficult or impossible for the offended party to confront the offender, and some offenses become public scandals before any accusations are made by the offended person.

[12] Some notorious or scandalous situations may require immediate attention such as closing the pulpit by a consistory. However, the appropriate judicatory must appoint an investigative committee as soon as reasonably possible to review this temporary disciplinary action and, under appropriate circumstances, to file a charge. If no charge is filed, any temporary disciplinary action must be lifted. Any temporary action must not be used as a shortcut to imposing permanent suspension without following Chapter 2, Part II, Article 4, the Procedure for Bringing a Charge.

[13] This section assumes that a board of elders is concerned about both the welfare of the members and of the congregation (1 Thessalonians 5:14-15).

[14] The discipline of an elder or deacon in this Section 2 refers to the "office" of elder or deacon. If a minister is serving as an elder or deacon, the minister (serving as elder or deacon) may be disciplined only by the middle assembly (see Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 4a and Chapter 2, Part II, Article 3, Section 4c).

[15] When a consistory "closes a pulpit," this is an immediate and short-term action only and must be reviewed by the middle assembly (see endnote #12).

[16] Also, a minister may apply for demission (see Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 13). However, demission is not the exercise of discipline. When demission occurs, the middle assembly must keep a record of the facts and circumstances surrounding demission for reference should the minister request reordination.

[17] This appeal is to a "higher judicatory" as Chapter 2, Part III, Article 1, Section 1 ("Nature of an Appeal") requires. In such an appeal, all references to "the lower judicatory" in Chapter 2, Part III should be interpreted as referring to the original General Synod CJB panel, and "the higher judicatory" refers to the full General Synod Commission on Judicial Business.

[18] The middle assembly has authority only to suspend a consistory and not to depose a consistory since a "consistory" is an assembly, not an office. The middle assembly must not confuse this action with that of supersession that is described in the *BCO* in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 9. Supersession is not a disciplinary action. In supersession the middle assembly replaces the consistory with an appointed board of trustees to carry on the work of consistory until such time as the life of the church has reached an end or a consistory for the church is reconstituted. "Legally constituted" means electing and installing new elders and deacons.

[19] "Provide" means reasonable efforts to deliver, such as hand delivery, certified mail, or email.

[20] A person not subject to the discipline of the judicatory may bring an accusation to the responsible judicatory. The accusation must meet the requirements set forth for a charge in Section 1 of this article. The judicatory appoints an investigative committee that will assess the accusation as outlined in Section 4 of this article. The committee will determine whether the accusation is of sufficient merit to become a charge, and if so, complete the process outlined in Article 4. The factual foundation for the charge(s) must be the same whether the charge(s) is brought by an individual or by a committee of the judicatory.

[21] This investigative committee must not include members of the judicial business commission in order to maintain their objectivity in considering the charge.

[22] The members of the committee will not be part of the deliberations at trial (see Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 6). The committee may be a standing committee, ad hoc committee, or committee of one.

This Section 4 outlines the criteria for determining sufficient merit to a charge(s). The committee of the judicatory may determine that even if a charge(s) is true, there should not be discipline.

[23] Mediation must include the accuser and the accused. Mediation does not resolve the matter unless both parties agree. Mediation is not always appropriate, especially when there is a significant power differential between the parties. The initiative for the committee filing a charge should not be dependent on the injured party. The judicatory may decide that discipline is appropriate even after personal reconciliation.

[24] Section 6 gives the investigative committee of the judicatory great authority, including the authority to dismiss a charge(s), or to arrive at a negotiated agreement, or to decide there is sufficient merit to proceed to trial by the judicatory.

The investigative committee is necessary to preserve the objectivity of the judicatory in the trial process. By having a committee of the judicatory determine whether there is sufficient merit for proceeding to trial, the judicatory is shielded from early knowledge of this evidence. Hearing this evidence prior to the trial could prejudice the judicatory's decision at trial. This separation of functions between the investigative committee and the judicatory is essential to the appearance of fundamental fairness in the process.

[25] It is sufficient for the committee of the judicatory to report to the judicatory commission that a charge(s) was investigated and found to be without merit without reporting the details of the charge(s).

[26] At all times during the trial the parties are to act with fundamental fairness.

[27] The clerk of the judicatory issues the citation and provides a copy of the citation to the accused by whatever means is fair.

[28] The accused may wish to end the process and accept the discipline of the judicatory. In that case, there is no need to proceed to trial.

[29] This may occur when the charge is "desertion of office" and the office bearer cannot be found. (*BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 13b)

[30] Fairness requires witnesses to be examined in the presence of the accused. When minor

children are witnesses, the judicatory must determine the appropriate means of protecting both the accused and the witnesses. “In the presence” may include the use of screens, video testimony, or other means fair to both the accused and the witnesses.

[31] A word-for-word record of the trial lets a higher judicatory review what happened during the trial to help it make its decision. This record might be a transcript, audio recording, or video recording.

[32] Counsel does not need to be an attorney. Counsel does not make decisions, only gives advice.

[33] This rule places the burden on the accuser to present the case to the judicatory. The accuser must provide evidence and witnesses to support the charge.

[34] A “high degree of probability” is the standard definition of the legal term “clear and convincing evidence.” It doesn’t mean absolute certainty, but it suggests strong confidence that the charge is proven based on available evidence.

[35] “Such other persons” may include the counsel for the judicatory.

[36] Counsel for the judicatory acts as an advisor and does not represent either the accused or the accuser.

[37] For more information on decisions by a Commission on Judicial Business see Part 1, Article 3.

[38] The trial decision establishes the facts but does not conclude the disciplinary process. The judicatory then enters a separate and equally important deliberation: determining appropriate discipline, choosing from the list in Chapter 2, Part II, Article 1, Section 2.

Parties excluded from the deliberations may be present for the imposition of discipline.

[39] A judicatory may be concerned about liability in the civil courts for damage to the reputation of the individual disciplined. To conceal the decision may cause further harm to the church at large. Under this Section 15, the judicatory must take whatever action is necessary in order to honor the Lord Jesus Christ and to help heal all those involved. Civil law may require the reporting of specific crimes.

[40] Discipline isn’t complete after a trial verdict or the imposition of discipline. The true aim of Christian discipline is restoration and reconciliation, welcoming the offender back into the community of faith and in the service of Christ (Hebrews 12:5-11; 2 Corinthians 2:5-8; Galatians 6:1-2; James 5:19-20). This redemptive step of forgiveness may be the hardest, but most rewarding.

Part III Complaints

[41] Historically this has been understood as including a committee of an assembly, a board of elders, or a board of deacons.

[42] A complaint filed against a committee of the consistory, a board of elders, or a board of deacons is also filed with the clerk of the middle assembly.

[43] This limit does not prevent the judicatory from responding to accusations made by those

who are not authorized to file a complaint. The judicatory may decide that the matter raises concerns that may be addressed pastorally with the lower body.

44 This section prevents a complainant from delaying the work of the church until they get what they want. However, if it seems wise, the assembly may decide that the action be put on hold for a period of time.

45 The notice signals to the accused assembly that a complaint is being considered. If the notice mentions the action of a committee or officer of an assembly, the notice gives the assembly the opportunity to resolve the dispute, or to support the accused when the complaint is considered by the higher judicatory.

46 The record includes official correspondence, meeting minutes, committee reports, and other materials relevant to the complaint. Full access to this information is essential for both the complainant and the assembly to ensure fairness, transparency, and a just process.

47 The parties must be notified of this first meeting but need not attend. The commission must first confirm the complainant's eligibility, timely filing, and sufficient documentation. It must allow for corrections of any irregularities. For example, if the complaint was submitted incorrectly as an appeal, it may be resubmitted to the judicatory.

48 Before this stage, the committee must not consider the complaint's merits, as it isn't officially before them until deemed valid. This delay avoids premature judgments and prevents discussions that could be seen as prejudicial to hearing the case fairly.

Qualifications for counsel are found in Chapter 2, Part II, Article 5, Sec. 10.

49 If a case is remanded with instructions the lower assembly may reach the same decision only after following the instructions given.

50 A conflict of interest arises when a member has a direct personal or financial interest in a matter that is not shared by other members of the assembly. Members of the judicatory with a conflict of interest must recuse themselves. If it can be proven that a conflict of interest was instrumental in the outcome of the case, an appeal may be filed alleging bias or prejudice in the case.

51 A standard of review, "preponderance of the evidence," is added to provide uniformity and clarity. This standard requires a party to prove that their claim is more likely true than not true, effectively demonstrating a greater than fifty percent likelihood based on the evidence presented.

52 This rule ensures that the case is decided in its proper place—in the judicatory of the church based on the evidence presented rather than the court of public opinion. Violating this rule can result in dismissing the case or may subject violators to discipline. However, the complainant may speak to others regarding the case for advice and counsel, as long as it does not appear that the conversations are designed to lobby for a certain outcome to the case.

Part IV Appeals

53 There are two types of appeal. First, if a lower judicatory has rendered a judgment on a complaint, that decision may be appealed to the higher judicatory. Second, a decision regarding discipline reached by a lower judicatory may be appealed to the higher judicatory

by one of the original parties. In either case, appeals are about ensuring fairness in the original process rather than reconsidering the merits of the case itself.

54 The appellate body does not retry cases or assess witness credibility. Its role is to safeguard against procedural injustice, especially when a lower body shows bias or makes serious errors. The appellant must demonstrate such errors; the higher judicatory is not responsible for uncovering them.

55 In the case of an appeal of the decision of the commission on judicial business of the middle assembly, the middle assembly may delegate to a committee of the assembly (by means of its bylaws or other action by the assembly) the task of determining whether the appeal and its papers are in order and the responsibility of making a recommendation to the whole assembly regarding the appeal.

56 In contrast to complaints (where absence may result in default) no prejudice is assigned in an appeal if a party fails to appear. The higher judicatory must still review the case based on the written record and submitted arguments.

57 A standard of review, "substantial evidence," is added to provide uniformity and clarity. Substantial evidence refers to evidence of sufficient relevance, quality, and quantity to support a claim. It is strong enough for a reasonable person to accept as valid. "Deference" means the judicatory accepts the judgment of the lower judicatory unless one of the grounds for the appeal can be proven to be a significant factor in their decision. Minor errors are not a basis for reversing the decision of the lower judicatory.

CHAPTER 3
THE BYLAWS AND SPECIAL RULES OF ORDER

Part I
The Bylaws of the General Synod

Article 1. Privileges and Duties of Delegates

Sec. 1. Seating of Delegates

a. A middle assembly shall be required to be current in the payment of its General Synod assessments before its delegates are seated as members of the General Synod.

b. Membership statistics for determining the number of delegates to General Synod shall be computed as of December 31st of the second year preceding the year in which General Synod is convened.

c. The configuration of middle assemblies 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.

Sec. 2. Attendance

Delegates are expected to attend all meetings of the General Synod unless excused by the Committee of Reference.

Article 2. Election of President and Vice-President

Sec. 1. Method of Election

Election of the president and vice-president shall ordinarily be by electing ballot. An affirmative vote of a majority of members of synod shall be required for election on an electing ballot.

Sec. 2. Election of the President

a. The current vice-president shall be the sole nominee on the first electing ballot. If the vote is affirmative, the current vice-president shall be declared elected.

b. If the vote is not affirmative, the election for president shall follow the process prescribed in Section 3 immediately following.

Sec. 3. Election of the Vice-President

a. A nominating ballot shall first be taken. If any delegate receives at least two-thirds of the votes cast, such delegate shall be declared elected.

b. If there is no election on the nominating ballot, every delegate receiving at least ten votes shall be in nomination and shall be introduced to the synod. The synod shall then proceed to an electing ballot. If there is no election, the synod shall proceed to a second electing ballot limited to the two persons receiving the largest number of votes on the first electing ballot.

Article 3. General Synod Council

Sec. 1. Membership

The membership of the council shall consist of the following:

a. The president, vice-president, and the immediate past president of General Synod.

b. Eight members recommended by the middle assemblies from among their regular 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 middle assemblies as determined by the General Synod.

c. Ten members among the regular middle assembly delegates to the immediately preceding General Synod who are elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations.

d. Three members from among the ministers and elders of the Reformed Church in America to assure that requisite gifts, skills, and diversity are present on the council who are elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations.

e. One member recommended by each racial and ethnic council and elected by the General Synod upon nomination by the Commission on Nominations.

f. One non-voting member from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

(ELCA), upon recommendation of the general secretary of the RCA.

g. The general secretary of the General Synod, *ex-officio* and without vote.

Sec. 2. Composition

a. One-half of the membership of the General Synod Council (GSC) shall be elders and one-half shall be ministers and no fewer than one-third of the membership shall be women. For purposes of the composition requirements of the preceding sentence, the vice-president, the nonvoting member from the ELCA, and the general secretary of the General Synod shall be excluded. The Commission on Nominations shall assure the composition of the council reflects the full diversity of the church.

b. The General Synod Council shall have racial and ethnic councils that express the collective vision and voice of racial and ethnic congregants and congregations as they develop ministries and advocate for policies of racial and ethnic inclusion, economic, social, and racial justice, both within the Reformed Church in America and ecumenically.

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 or the middle assemblies 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.

Sec. 4. Officers

The officers of the council shall be: moderator, first vice-moderator, second vice-moderator, and secretary.

a. The moderator will be elected annually by the General Synod Council from among the voting members.

b. The immediate past president of the General Synod shall be the first vice-moderator, unless already elected to office, in which case the first vice-moderator shall be elected from the membership of the General Synod Council.

c. The vice-president of General Synod shall be the second vice-moderator, unless already elected to office, in which case the second vice-moderator shall be elected from the membership of the General Synod Council.

d. The general secretary of the General Synod shall be the secretary.

Sec. 5. Meetings

a. The council shall hold three stated meetings each year.

b. The council shall hold special meetings when necessary.

Sec. 6. Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the council shall be:

a. To serve as the Executive Committee of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod, and as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law.

b. To act as the agent of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America to enable its participation in God's work in the world and to equip congregations and assemblies for mission and ministry. As such, it shall establish and review policies for such programs as fulfill these purposes. General Synod Council staff shall implement and administer such programs. It shall work with other agencies, commissions, institutions, and offices of the church to which the General Synod assigns specific responsibility, and as the General Synod directs.

c. To prepare a budget to sustain the established priorities, ministry, and mission of the Reformed Church in America and propose an assessment to the General Synod. Assessments shall be a specific percentage of income voted by the General Synod, payment of which shall be mandatory.

d. To administer the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod.

e. To manage the property, business, financial, legal, and other affairs and concerns of the General Synod of the Reformed Church in America.

f. To support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the commissions, boards, institutions, and agencies of the Reformed Church in America, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church.

g. To review all General Synod commissions at least once during each five-year period and to recommend to General Synod a continuation of, a reconstitution of, or a discontinuation of such commissions, with the understanding that the necessity for continuation shall not be assumed.

h. To select and supervise a General Secretary and to establish personnel policies through which other personnel may be employed as may be beneficial to carry out the work of the church.

i. To perform such other duties as shall be delegated and referred to it by the General Synod and to submit an annual report of its work to the General Synod.

Article 4. Membership on General Synod Agencies and Commissions

Sec. 1. Terms of Office

The following shall apply to all General Synod agencies and commissions, except as otherwise provided in the constitution or other enabling documents of the agency or commission:

a. The term of office for members shall be three years.

b. Members may be elected to two consecutive terms.

c. All terms shall begin on July 1 and end on June 30.

d. A partial term of more than one year shall be considered a full term in determining eligibility.

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 hold other than *ex-officio* membership on the General Synod Council.

No person shall be eligible to hold other than *ex-officio* membership on more than one agency or commission in each of the following groups:

a. The commissions of the General Synod.

b. Delegations to ecumenical organizations.

Sec. 3. Vacancies

All vacancies shall be filled by the General Synod Council unless otherwise specified in the Bylaws. All such appointments shall be subject to approval of the General Synod at its next stated session.

Sec. 4. Racial and Ethnic Participation

A racial and ethnic council recognized by the General Synod Council may request racial and ethnic participation in other agencies and commissions of the General Synod. Such requests shall be directed to the General Synod Council which shall consult with the affected agencies and commissions and make recommendations to the General Synod. If the request for participation is granted by the General Synod, it shall be implemented by the Commission on Nominations.

Article 5. Commissions

Sec. 1. General Provisions

a. Membership

Members of the General Synod commissions shall be appointed by the synod at its annual stated session. Unless otherwise specified, each commission shall have a moderator and a secretary elected by the commission at the meeting prior to General Synod.

b. Responsibilities

The commissions shall prepare studies and develop policies for recommendation to the General Synod as they shall consider useful or as the Synod shall assign. They shall also carry out other responsibilities specifically assigned in these Bylaws or by legislative act of the General Synod.

c. Consultants

All commissions of the General Synod, except the Commission on Judicial Business and the Commission on Nominations, shall have authority to engage as consultants up to three persons with special qualifications in major areas of current concern. Such consultants shall be engaged for a period not to exceed one year and shall serve for not more than three consecutive years. They shall serve without remuneration but may be reimbursed for expenses.

d. Racial and Ethnic Council Reports

As soon as reasonably practicable following the end of the immediately preceding General Synod, each commission shall provide a report to each racial and ethnic council established by the General Synod Council identifying the anticipated business of the commission for the upcoming year. The purpose of the report shall be to allow the racial and ethnic councils to provide advice and input to the commission's work for the upcoming year.

Sec. 2. Commission on Christian Action

a. Membership

The commission shall have nine members. There shall also be two ecumenical observers named by the Commission on Christian Action, subject to the approval of the General Synod: one from other Reformed churches and one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The term of office for ecumenical appointees shall be three years. They shall be subject to re-election for one additional term. All members shall be persons who have a strong desire and demonstrated ability to make the gospel and the Christian way of life applicable to contemporary social issues in both the United States and Canada.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall inform and advise the church concerning current social issues and the scriptural and Christian principles by which critical evaluation may be exercised on those issues and proper action taken.

Sec. 3. Commission on Christian Unity

a. Membership

The commission shall have nine members. One of the members shall be from another denomination and shall be named by the Commission on Christian Unity subject to the approval of General Synod. The general secretary shall be a member *ex-officio* without vote.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall initiate and supervise action with respect to the Reformed Church in America's membership in or affiliation with ecumenical bodies.

2. It shall engage in interchurch conversations and appoint ecumenical delegates to other church bodies.

3. It shall inform the church of current ecumenical developments and advise the church concerning its ecumenical participation and relationships.

Sec. 4. Commission on Church Order

a. Membership

The commission shall have five members. Two shall be lay persons with legal training and experience. A general knowledge of, and interest in, the structure, government, and function of the denomination shall be required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall have responsibility for making recommendations concerning the content, structure, and style of the *Book of Church Order*.

2. The commission shall provide advisory responses to requests for interpretation of the *Book of Church Order*.

Sec. 5. Commission on History

a. Membership

The commission shall have six members. The archivist and the general editor of the historical series shall serve as continuing consultants. A knowledge of, and interest in, the history of the Reformed Church in America shall be required of all members. Professional competence in this field is desirable.

b. Responsibilities

1. Through a sub-committee of two or three of its members, chosen on the advice of the RCA archivist, the commission shall advise the General Synod on the collection of official records and documents of the Reformed Church in America, its churches, assemblies, and agencies.

2. The commission shall actively promote research on, interest in, and reflection on, the history and traditions of the Reformed Church in America through whatever means as it may find effective.

3. The commission shall be responsible for complete oversight of the Historical Series:

   i. It shall define the mission and scope of the series.

   ii. It shall appoint the general editor of the series and review his/her work.

   iii. It shall invite publications, fully review publications recommended by the general editor to determine whether or not they shall be published, and make decisions concerning reprinting previously published works.

   iv. It shall create and maintain policies concerning such matters as author/editor remuneration, royalties, publication subventions, the means of production and distribution, and handling of proceeds.

   v. It shall annually receive and review a complete financial report from the general editor of the series.

4. The commission shall inform the Reformed Church in America of the relevance of the denomination's history and traditions to its program, and regularly review denominational resources that present the church's history.

5. The commission shall provide a "history center" by regularly reporting on the activities of the Reformed Church in America's educational institutions as these relate to the history and traditions of the denomination.

Sec. 6. Commission on Judicial Business

a. Membership

Each middle assembly 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 middle assembly, 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.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall carry out the responsibilities assigned to it in the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures.

Sec. 7. Commission on Race and Ethnicity

a. Membership

The commission shall have eight members. The membership shall include at least one person recommended from each of the racial and ethnic councils of the General Synod Council of the Reformed Church in America. At least one-half of the membership shall be laypersons.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall advise the church on policies and initiatives that address issues of institutional racism and the commitment of the Reformed Church in America to become a fully multicultural and multiethnic denomination.

2. The commission shall serve as an advocate for transformation of the Reformed Church in America in regard to its multiracial and multiethnic life.

3. The commission shall recommend policies, objectives, guidelines, and strategies to assist the Reformed Church in America in its

effort through all of its agencies, commissions, institutions, and other affiliated bodies to become a fully multiracial and multiethnic church.

4. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the Reformed Church in America's progress in achieving its multiracial and multiethnic objectives.

Sec. 8. Commission on Nominations

a. Membership

The commission shall have thirteen members, eight representing the middle assemblies, 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 middle assembly shall nominate a layperson or a member of the middle assembly who is either a minister or commissioned pastor in alternating periods of equitable rotation in order to ensure that the commission will have within its membership at least three laypersons and at least three members of middle assemblies. The members representing African Americans, Hispanics, Native American Indians, and Pacific and Asian Americans shall be nominated by their respective councils or representative bodies.

b. The Moderator

The commission moderator shall be nominated by the commission from among the members who have served at least two years and shall be elected by the General Synod.

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 middle assemblies 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 middle assemblies, be responsible for gathering information on nominees.

4. The commission shall monitor the inclusiveness of the membership of the various commissions and agencies with respect to geography, gender, age, cultural and social differences, and academic and other appropriate expertise.

   The commission shall also monitor required nominations of racial and ethnic persons to insure that the nominating body has consulted with the appropriate racial and ethnic council and that it has shown cause if it has been unable to meet the requirement.

Sec. 9. Commission on Theology

a. Membership

The commission shall have ten members. The membership shall include two persons from among the Reformed Church seminary faculties, one General Synod professor, two persons from among the faculties of the Reformed Church colleges, three Ministers of Word and Sacrament (at least one of whom serves a local church), and at least two people who do not hold the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament. There shall also be two ecumenical observers named by the Commission on Theology, subject to the approval of the General Synod: one from other reformed bodies and one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The term of office for ecumenical appointees shall be three years. They shall be subject to re-election for one additional term. Competence in theology is required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall study theological matters arising in the life of the

church and referred to it by the General Synod or initiated within the commission itself.

Sec. 10. Commission for Women

a. Membership

The commission shall have eight members. All members shall share a strong desire to work for the full and complete participation of women in realizing the vision of a church and society inclusive of all gifts of all persons. Two members shall be men.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall:

1. Provide opportunities and resources for developing awareness and raising consciousness concerning human liberation related to the role of women in church and society.

2. Participate and provide information for appointments to committees, commissions, agencies, and staff positions to insure partnership of men and women in the professional and decision-making leadership of the denomination.

3. Assist the church toward insuring inclusive attitudes, images, and language in all materials published, designed, or provided for use in the denomination.

4. Develop, advocate, and implement strategies for systematic change to enable the full and complete participation of women in church and society.

5. Collaborate with other RCA bodies working on issues affecting women.

6. Develop and maintain relationships with similar groups in other denominations, exchanging ideas and materials regarding issues affecting women.

Sec. 11. Commission on Christian Worship

a. Membership

The commission shall have seven members. An interest and competence in the fields of liturgics, arts, or church music shall be required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

The commission shall:

1. Advise the church of changes needed in the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship.

2. Create and disseminate worship resources for church and personal use.

3. Recommend standards for worship music and be responsible for *Rejoice in the Lord*, its subsequent editions and successor.

4. Advise the church with critique of the various versions of the Bible.

5. Inform the church of current development in liturgics, hymnody, and other worship resources with appropriate critique.

Sec. 12. Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education

a. Membership

The commission shall have seven members. At least three shall be persons with responsibility for discipleship and education in RCA churches and one shall be a member from the faculty of an RCA-affiliated institution. A knowledge of, and interest in, Christian education and discipleship shall be required of all members.

b. Responsibilities

1. The commission shall develop and advocate for strategies for people of all ages to be fully included in the mission and life of the RCA.

2. The commission shall monitor, evaluate, and report on the RCA's progress in ministries of education and discipleship with children, youth, adults, and families.

3. The commission shall collaborate with RCA staff, assemblies, agencies, and institutions to promote and strengthen the next generation in discipleship within RCA congregations.

4. The commission shall advocate for the ongoing preparation of those who carry out the church's teaching ministry.

Article 6. The Professorate

Sec. 1. Membership

All active General Synod professors shall be a member of this body. It shall meet at least annually to execute its responsibilities.

Sec. 2. Responsibilities

a. The professorate shall engage the church in reflection on theological matters that in its judgment are central to the life and ministry of the church.

b. The professorate shall consider any matter referred to it by the General Synod.

c. The professorate may initiate and consider studies on behalf of the entire church and shall submit them to the General Synod for consideration.

d. The professorate shall, upon request, offer advice and counsel to the various agencies and commissions of the General Synod.

e. The professorate may originate and shall review any proposed changes in standards for theological education to the General Synod.

f. The professorate may provide assistance to RCA agencies and assemblies in the preparation and evaluation of candidates for ministry.

g. The professorate shall establish a process for selecting five of its

members to attend General Synod each year as voting delegates. It shall ensure that each year's delegation includes at least one professor from each of the seminaries, and at least one professor who serves as a teacher or certification committee member under the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency.

h. The professorate shall elect a moderator with a defined length of term.

Article 7. General Synod Agencies

Sec. 1. Definition

General Synod agencies shall be those boards and institutions the enabling documents or constitutions of which have been approved by the General Synod.

Sec. 2. Content of Enabling Documents

The enabling documents of General Synod agencies shall include articles stating the name, purpose, and membership, and providing for meetings, reports to General Synod, bylaws, and amendments.

Article 8. Advisory Committees

Sec. 1. Function of Advisory Committees

The advisory committees shall conduct the business of the General Synod as assigned to them by the General Synod Council and as reported to the first business meeting of General Synod.

Sec. 2. Advisory Committees

The General Synod shall have such advisory committees as it deems appropriate.

Sec. 3. Membership of Advisory Committees

a. The president shall ordinarily appoint the delegates to the advisory committees as needed, according to the gifts of the delegates to that Synod. The appointments and any changes shall be submitted to the General Synod Council for approval.

b. The advisory committees shall all be approximately the same size.

c. Representatives of the agencies or institutions whose reports are being reviewed shall be corresponding members of the appropriate advisory committee.

d. Each assembly having business before an advisory committee shall be permitted to send two representatives as resource persons.

Article 9. Corresponding Delegates

Sec. 1. Corresponding Delegate Privileges

Corresponding delegates fully participate in General Synod but cannot vote, make motions, or be elected to office.

Sec. 2. General Synod Professors

A General Synod professor who is present at the session of the General Synod, but who is not a regular delegate from the professorate, shall be recognized as a corresponding delegate.

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.

[*Sec. 4.* Retained for future use.]

Sec. 5. Seminary Students

Each RCA and officially related seminary shall appoint two students as corresponding delegates.

The Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall appoint two students not enrolled in an RCA seminary as corresponding delegates.

Sec. 6. General Secretary

The general secretary shall be a corresponding delegate.

Sec. 7. General Synod Council

The members of the General Synod Council shall be corresponding delegates.

Sec. 8. Commissions

Each General Synod commission shall appoint one of its members as a corresponding delegate.

Sec. 9. Seminary Presidents, Moderators, or Members of Boards of Trustees

The presidents of the seminaries and the moderator or another member of the respective boards of trustees for the seminaries and for the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency shall be corresponding delegates.

Sec. 10. Ecumenical Delegates

The Commission on Christian Unity may invite not more than eleven ecumenical delegates, who shall be corresponding delegates.

Sec. 11. Women and Youth Corresponding Delegates

a. Each of sixteen middle assemblies 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. Each of eight middle assemblies determined using an equitable rotation may appoint one young adult as a corresponding delegate.

c. Each middle assembly may only appoint one woman or youth corresponding delegate at each General Synod.

Sec. 12. Board of Benefits Services President or Member

The president of the Board of Benefits Services, or another of its members designated by the Board of Benefits Services, shall be a corresponding delegate.

Sec. 13. RCA Church Growth Fund

The president of the RCA Church Growth Fund board of directors, or another of its members designated by the RCA Church Growth Fund board of directors, shall be a corresponding delegate.

Sec. 14. Specific Commission Additional Appointments

The Commission for Women shall appoint one delegate who is a woman and not a member of the commission; the Commission on Race and Ethnicity shall appoint one delegate who is a racial/ethnic minority member and not a member of the commission; the Commission on Christian Discipleship and Education shall appoint one delegate who is a young adult and not a member of the commission.

Article 10. Committee on Emergencies

Sec. 1. Purpose

A Committee on Emergencies shall be convened whenever necessary in response to a disaster or crisis that would prevent the General Synod from meeting in its stated session or disrupt plans to hold a session at a particular venue, such as a fire, natural disaster, or another sudden calamity.

Sec. 2. Membership

The membership of the committee shall consist of the following:

a. The president, vice president, and the immediate past president of General Synod, *ex-officio* and without vote.

b. The president of each middle assembly, or if unable to attend, the middle assembly may designate its vice president or stated clerk.

c. The general secretary of the General Synod, *ex-officio* and without vote.

Sec. 3. Meetings

a. The committee shall be convened by the president of General Synod, in the event of an emergency as described in Section 1. In the event of a disaster that makes his or her participation impossible, the basis of succession for convening shall be: (a) vice president, (b) immediate past president of General Synod.

b. Meetings may be held using electronic means as long as the meeting allows for simultaneous aural communication among all participating members.

c. The presence of two thirds of the middle assembly representatives is required to constitute a quorum.

d. By a two thirds vote of those present, this committee is empowered to postpone a session of the General Synod and schedule the time and place for the next session, set the amount of the General Synod assessment, act on recommendations offered by the Commission on Nominations, or other actions that may be required for the General Synod to function.

e. The convener shall make a report to the next session of the General Synod of all meetings held and actions taken under this emergency provision. At the next session of the General Synod, all decisions of this committee must be reviewed and ratified to continue to have effect.

Article 11. Rules of Order

The rules of order of the General Synod shall be those set forth in the most recent edition of *Robert's Rules of Order* except as is otherwise specified in

the Special Rules of Order of the General Synod.

Article 12. Amendments

The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod may be amended at any stated session of the synod by vote of a majority of all the members present, provided that due notice of the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing at a previous stated session and has received the approval of a majority at that session. An amendment to the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order shall go into effect upon announcement by the president of the Synod of favorable action under this provision.

Part II

Special Rules of Order of the General Synod

Article 1. Order of Business

Sec. 1. Formation of General Synod

a. Call to Order

b. Worship

c. Presentation of Roll of General Synod

d. Seating of Delegates

e. Declaration Concerning a Quorum

f. Reading of the Minutes by Title

g. Procedure for Approving the Journal

h. Presentation of the Rules of Order

i. Appointment of Tellers

j. Approval of the Agenda and Schedule

Sec. 2. Agenda of General Synod

a. Disposition of Communications

b. Final Declarative Resolutions on Middle Assembly–Approved Constitutional Amendments

c. Presentation and Referral of New Business

d. Report of the General Secretary

e. Report of the President

f. Report of the General Synod Council

g. Report of the Board of Directors

h. Report of the Commission on Judicial Business

i. Reports of the Advisory Committees

j. Election of Officers

k. Report of the Corresponding Delegate from the Commission on Church Order

l. Report of the Commission on Nominations

m. Report of the Committee of Reference

Sec. 3. Close of General Synod

a. Transfer of Presidential Office

b. Celebration of the Lord's Supper

c. Adjournment

Sec. 4. Prayer and Worship

Each meeting of the General Synod shall be opened and closed with prayer. The first meeting of each day shall begin with a worship service.

Article 2. Presentation of Business

Sec. 1. Objective of Reports

Reports to the General Synod shall be directed toward one or more of the following objectives:

a. Inform General Synod of major policy and program developments in the past year's work of the reporting agency.

b. Make recommendations for General Synod action.

c. Raise issues for study and discussion in the church.

Sec. 2. Components of Reports

Reports to the General Synod shall contain the following components:

a. Information on the general work of the reporting agency.

b. Information on the agency's work related to current denominational priorities.

c. Report on matters referred by the previous General Synod.

d. Recommendations on all matters requiring General Synod action.

Sec. 3. Style of Reports

Reports should be written for the church at large.

Sec. 4. Length of Reports

Reports shall be as brief as comprehensive treatment allows. Recommendations shall be supported with brief background information. Study documents and policy papers shall be attached as appendices.

Reports and statements other than those prepared by RCA agencies but related to their work may be briefly summarized in appendices if references are not adequate. They shall not be appended in full unless they are being recommended as official position papers.

Sec. 5. Preparation of Reports

Reports shall ordinarily be reviewed by the reporting agency. If this has not taken place, a statement shall be appended to the end of the report, indicating: who wrote the report, who reviewed the report, and who approved the report. Reports to General Synod shall be submitted to the General Synod office three months before a session of General Synod.

Sec. 6. Presentation of Reports

Advisory committees may supplement the printed reports with their own reports, but shall not repeat materials from the General Synod Workbook. Reports to General Synod may be commented upon, but shall not be read. The moderator of the advisory committee shall present the report to General Synod. All recommendations from the reports of commissions and agencies shall be received as motions. The advisory committee shall advise the General Synod concerning each recommendation after the recommendation has been presented by a representative of the permanent body. Representatives of reporting agencies may be invited to supplement reports orally in the meetings of the advisory committees but shall not address the General Synod.

Sec. 7. Submission of Overtures

The General Synod may receive overtures from a middle assembly. It shall not receive overtures that deal with matters under adjudication or that make either direct or implied charges against persons. Overtures from middle assemblies shall be submitted to the General Synod office no later than two months before a session of General Synod.

Sec. 8. Presentation and Referral of New Business

The General Synod shall provide an opportunity for presenting new business in the first meeting of synod and immediately prior to the last scheduled meeting of advisory committees. The presentation shall include a well-defined statement of the nature and purpose of the proposed business and of the reasons for its presentation as new business rather than through the church's assemblies, agencies, or commissions. All new business shall automatically be referred to the Committee of Reference which shall make recommendation to the General Synod concerning the acceptance of it as new business and, if accepted, its disposition through referral or other appropriate action.

Sec. 9. Appointment of Special Committees

Any recommendation submitted to the General Synod that includes the establishment of a special committee, task force, or any other body (hereinafter "special committee") shall automatically be referred to the Committee of Reference. The Committee of Reference shall determine whether the work falls within the responsibilities of an existing commission, committee, or agency

of the General Synod. If the proposed task falls within the purview of an existing body, the Committee of Reference may recommend the appointment of the special committee provided it states clearly the reasons for doing so. In any case, it shall state the purpose of the special committee, the method of appointment, the length of service, and the means by which it shall report to the General Synod. Whenever appropriate, special committees shall work in conjunction with the relevant commissions and agencies of the General Synod.

Article 3. Transaction of Business

Sec. 1. Consultation

All agencies, commissions, and committees shall consult with other bodies affected by their recommendations before reporting to the General Synod. If such consultation has not taken place or if the body consulted has not concurred, the recommendations shall be referred to the Committee of Reference for report back to that session of synod.

Sec. 2. Proposed Amendments to the Book of Church Order

All proposed amendments to the *Book of Church Order* shall be referred to the Committee of Reference in consultation with the corresponding delegate from the Commission on Church Order for final wording and report back to the General Synod.

Sec. 3. Budget Changes

All proposed changes in the budget of General Synod shall automatically be referred to the Committee of Reference for review and report back to the synod.

Sec. 4. Roll Call Vote

A member of the General Synod shall have the right to require that the names of all members with their votes for or against an action of the synod be recorded in the minutes for the information of all; however, that request may be denied by a two-thirds majority of the synod.

Appendix

The Formularies of the Reformed Church in America

1. Declaration for Licensed Candidates

(This Declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the middle assembly. The candidate shall then sign the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the middle assembly.)

I, [NAME OF CANDIDATE], in becoming a licensed candidate for the ministry in the Reformed Church in America sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the middle assembly, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and in accordance with the Liturgy and the *Book of Church Order*.

2. Attestation of a Licensed Candidate

To all whom it may concern: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Head of the church, we send greeting.

Be it known that [NAME OF CANDIDATE], having presented to the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] testimonials of literary and theological attainments from the professors of the theological seminary at [NAME OF SEMINARY] in [LOCATION OF SEMINARY], was admitted to an examination in the Hebrew and Greek languages, and in the various branches of theology, as prescribed in the Government of the Reformed Church in America; and that the middle assembly being well satisfied with [his/her] gifts, piety, and qualifications to preach the gospel did resolve, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the church, that the said [FIRST OR FULL NAME OF

CANDIDATE] be, and hereby is, allowed and authorized as a candidate for the sacred ministry within its bounds, and wherever the providence of God may call [him/her] to preach the gospel of our blessed Lord and Savior. The said middle assembly recommends [him/her] to the esteem and attention of all those to whom these presents may come as one well qualified to preach the crucified and risen Savior.

The middle assembly fervently prays that the great Head of the church may further qualify [him/her] for the work of the ministry, and make [him/her] eminently useful in that part of his vineyard where [he/she] may be called.

Done in middle assembly, in [LOCATION OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY MEETING], on [DATE].

_____
[NAME OF PRESIDENT], President

_____
[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk

3. Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

(This Declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the middle assembly at the time of reception into the middle assembly. The newly received Minister of Word and Sacrament shall then sign the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the middle assembly.)

I, [NAME OF MINISTER], in becoming a minister of the Word of God in the Reformed Church in America, within the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY], sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the middle assembly, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and in accordance with the Liturgy and the *Book of Church Order*.

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God.

I ask God, and you His servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King.

4. Attestation of an Ordained Minister of Word and Sacrament

To all whom it may concern: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Head of the church, we send greeting.

Be it known that [NAME OF MINISTER] was admitted by the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] to an examination in the various branches of theology, as prescribed in the Government of the Reformed Church in America, preparatory to ordination, and the middle assembly, being well satisfied with [his/her] gifts, piety, and qualifications to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, did resolve, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the King and Head of the church, that [FIRST OR FULL NAME OF MINISTER] be ordained to the ministry of Word and sacrament in the Reformed Church in America. In conformity with that resolution the middle assembly set [him/her] apart solemnly, on [DATE], to the work of the sacred ministry, according to the rites and forms of the Reformed Church in America, and received [him/her] into the ministerial fellowship. The said middle assembly recommends [him/her] to the esteem and attention of all those to whom this document shall come, as one qualified to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The middle assembly fervently prays that the great Head of the church may abundantly qualify [him/her] for the work of the ministry, and make [him/her] eminently useful wherever [he/she] may be called to labor.

Done in middle assembly, in [LOCATION OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY MEETING], on [DATE].

_____

[NAME OF PRESIDENT], President

_____

[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk

5. Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament

To the Rev. [NAME OF MINISTER], grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Whereas, [NAME AND LOCATION OF CHURCH] is well satisfied with the piety, gifts, and ministerial qualifications of you, [NAME OF MINISTER], and has good hope that your labors as a minister of the gospel in this place will be attended with a blessing.

Therefore, we, [LEGAL TITLE OF CHURCH], hereby solemnly and in the fear of the Lord do call you, [NAME OF MINISTER], to be our pastor and teacher; to preach the Word of God in truth and faithfulness; to administer the holy sacraments agreeably to the institution of Christ; to edify the congregation, and especially the youth by catechetical instruction and by explaining the essential truths of the Holy Scriptures; to maintain Christian discipline; and to fulfill as a faithful servant of Jesus Christ the whole work of the gospel ministry in conformity with the Word of God and the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America, to which you, upon accepting this call, must, with us, remain subordinate.

It is further stipulated that in fulfilling the ordinary duties of your ministry, besides preaching on such texts of Scripture as you may deem proper to select for our instruction, you also explain the points of doctrine contained in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and that you conform to the usual practice of our congregation in rendering all customary public service. The particular services required of you are: [HERE INSERT SUCH PARTICULARS AS THE CONSISTORY MAY DEEM NECESSARY].

We promise you in the name of this church all proper attention, love, and obedience in the Lord. We promise and oblige ourselves to encourage you in the discharge of the duties of your important office, and to free you from worldly avocation while you are dispensing spiritual blessings to us, to pay you the sum of $[AMOUNT] in [FREQUENCY OF PAYMENT; e.g., weekly, monthly, twice per monthly] payments yearly and every year, and to consider annually whether such payments are adequate, as long as you continue to be the minister of the church, together with [HERE INSERT PARTICULARS THAT REFER TO A PARSONAGE OR RESIDENCE, OR OTHER EMOLUMENTS]. As long as you continue to be the minister of this church, we also promise to pay benefits as stipulated by the Board of

Benefits Services, which may include contributions to the Reformed Church retirement plan, group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance for you and your immediate family.

If you and your immediate family elect medical coverage through your spouse's employer-sponsored group plan, we promise to compensate you for any medical premium costs incurred by your immediate family, up to the amount stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services.

In addition we promise to provide a minimum of one week and a stipend equal to not less than the equivalent of 1/52 of the minimum cash salary established by the middle assembly for a study program mutually agreed upon by you and us for your professional development, for each year in service with our congregation. By mutual agreement this time and money may be accumulated to a maximum equivalent of four years of service. We hereby bind ourselves and our successors for the performance of all the foregoing by the underwritten signatures of the consistory members to this instrument.

May the Lord incline your heart to a cheerful acceptance of this call and send you to us in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of peace.

Done in consistory and subscribed with our names on [DATE].
Attested by _____
[NAME], Supervisor of the call

[Signature lines for all consistory members and the required middle assembly officers must be inserted—see *BCO* Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 3 regarding signatures of consistory members and *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 7 regarding the requirement for middle assembly approval of a call prior to the call being submitted to the minister.]

6. Appointment of a General Synod Professor

To the Rev. [NAME OF GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSOR]:

The General Synod of the Reformed Church in America, reposing confidence in your piety, learning, and talents, has elected you a General Synod professor, to offer the ministry of teaching within the RCA as a whole, and to represent the living tradition of the church in the preparation and certification of candidates for its ministry.

May the Head of the church make your labors useful and pleasant.

Signed by the order of the synod,

_____

[NAME OF GENERAL SYNOD PRESIDENT], President

Done in General Synod on [DATE].

7. Declaration for a General Synod Professor

(This declaration shall be made in the presence of the Christian community at the time of installation. It shall be made orally by the person being installed. The newly installed professor shall sign the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the General Synod.)

I, [NAME OF GENERAL SYNOD PROFESSOR], in becoming a General Synod professor of the Reformed Church in America, sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I will submit myself in matters of doctrine and the exercise of my office to the counsel and admonition of the General Synod, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and in accordance with the Liturgy and the *Book of Church Order*.

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God.

I ask God, and you His servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King.

8. Application for the Dissolution of a Pastoral Relationship

To the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:

This certifies that the undersigned was present by request at a meeting of the consistory of [NAME AND LOCATION OF CHURCH] on [DATE], and superintended the proceedings thereof. It was resolved at that meeting that an application be made to the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] for a dissolution of the pastoral relationship between the Rev. [NAME OF MINISTER] and said church effective on [DATE]. The Rev. [NAME OF MINISTER] concurred in that application.

_____

[NAME], Minister of Middle Assembly
[DATE]

9. Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament

(To transfer a minister to another denomination, use Formulary No. 18.)

Dismission of a Minister

To the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:
From the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:

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

When received by the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY], this minister's relation to this middle assembly shall cease.

Last served as delegate to General Synod: [DATE]
Year of ordination: [YEAR]

_____
[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk
[DATE]

Receipt of a Minister

To the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:
From the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:

This is to certify that the Rev. [NAME OF MINISTER] was received to unite with the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] and signed the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament on [DATE].

_____
[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk
[DATE]

10. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church Member

This certifies that [NAME OF MEMBER] is a confessing member of [NAME AND LOCATION OF TRANSFERRING CHURCH] in good and regular standing. [NAME OF MEMBER] was duly ordained to the office of [elder/deacon]. As such [NAME OF MEMBER] is at [his/her] own request transferred to [NAME AND LOCATION OF RECEIVING CHURCH], to whose Christian fellowship and confidence [he/she] is hereby affectionately commended. When received by them, [NAME OF MEMBER]'s relation to this church shall cease.

By order of the Board of Elders.

_____

[NAME OF PRESIDENT], President

Given at [NAME AND LOCATION WHERE SIGNED BY PRESIDENT], [DATE].

Note: This certificate is valid only for one year from its date, except when there has been no opportunity to present it.

11. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church to Another Denomination

The [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] of the Reformed Church in America hereby certifies that it has duly considered the petition of [NAME AND LOCATION OF PETITIONING CHURCH] for leave to withdraw from the denomination and to affiliate with the [NAME OF THE DENOMINATION]; that it has duly ascertained the will of the members of that church, and that 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 said church has satisfied its financial obligations to the denomination, pursuant to the Government of the Reformed Church in America.

Therefore, the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] of the Reformed Church in America does hereby dismiss the aforementioned church from its jurisdiction, subject to the provisions of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 3 of the Government of the Reformed Church in America, and affectionately commends that church to the [NAME OF THE DENOMINATION].

In witness whereof, this certificate has been duly signed by order of such middle assembly on [DATE].

_____

[NAME], President

_____

[NAME], Stated Clerk

12. Charge

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

NAME OF THE ACCUSER
[NAME OF ACCUSER]

ADDRESS
[ADDRESS OF ACCUSER]

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP
[NAME OF CHURCH WHERE ACCUSER IS MEMBER]

NAME OF THE ACCUSED
[NAME OF ACCUSED]

NATURE OF ALLEGED OFFENSE
[DESCRIPTION OF GENERAL NATURE OF ALLEGED OFFENSE]

TIME, PLACE, CIRCUMSTANCES OF ALLEGED OFFENSE
[FACTS IN SUPPORT OF CLAIM THAT ALLEGED OFFENSE OCCURRED]

[DATE]

_____
[NAME]

13. Citation to an Accused Person or Consistory

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

IN THE MATTER OF THE
CHARGES BY:
[NAME OF ACCUSER]
THE ACCUSER,

AGAINST

CITATION TO AN
ACCUSED PERSON*

[NAME OF ACCUSED]
THE ACCUSED.

TO THE ABOVE ACCUSED:
Pursuant to authorities granted to the undersigned by the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2—The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures—Part I, Article 5, you are hereby summoned to appear before this judicatory and answer to the charge against you, a copy of which is presented herewith, at [TIME] [a.m./p.m.] on [DATE], at [LOCATION].

_____
[NAME], Presiding Officer

_____
[NAME], Clerk of the Consistory
of [NAME AND LOCATION OF CHURCH]

OR

_____
[NAME], Clerk of Middle Assembly
of the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]

*where the accusation is against a consistory, the word "consistory" should be substituted for the word "person."

14. Citation to a Witness

REFORMED CHURCH IN AMERICA

IN THE MATTER OF THE
CHARGES BY:
[NAME OF ACCUSER]
THE ACCUSER,

AGAINST — CITATION TO A WITNESS

[NAME OF ACCUSED]
THE ACCUSED.

Pursuant to authorities granted to the undersigned by the *Book of Church Order*, Chapter 2—The Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures—Part I, Article 5, you are hereby summoned to appear before this judicatory and give such testimony as you may have in this case at [TIME] [a.m./p.m.] on [DATE], at [LOCATION].

_____
[NAME], Presiding Officer

_____
[NAME], Clerk of the Consistory
of [NAME AND LOCATION OF CHURCH]

OR

_____
[NAME], Clerk of Middle Assembly
of the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]

15. Provision for Articles of Incorporation for Congregations

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in this [INSERT DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL DOCUMENT], this [corporation/organization] is a member church in the Reformed Church in America; is (and at all times shall be) subject to and governed by the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America; and agrees that the provisions of this [article/chapter/paragraph] shall not be amended or modified in any manner without the prior written consent of the middle assembly with jurisdiction over this [corporation/organization].

16. Declaration for Commissioned Pastors

(This declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the middle assembly at the beginning of each commissioning approved by the middle assembly. The newly commissioned pastor shall then sign the declaration, which shall be maintained as a permanent record of the middle assembly.)

I, [NAME OF COMMISSIONED PASTOR], in becoming a commissioned pastor in the Reformed Church in America, within the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY], sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and as expressed in the Standards of the Reformed Church in America. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Standards as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God.

In this commission, I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the middle assembly, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith. I will conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and in accordance with the Liturgy and the *Book of Church Order*.

Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge myself in this commission to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God. I ask God, and you, his servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King.

17. Certificate of Transfer for a Licensed Candidate

Dismission of a Licensed Candidate

To the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:
From the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:

This certifies that [NAME OF CANDIDATE] is a licensed candidate in the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]. [NAME OF CANDIDATE] is now requesting a transfer to the care of the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY], to whose Christian fellowship and care this licensed candidate is affectionately commended.

When received by the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY], [NAME OF CANDIDATE]'s relationship to this middle assembly shall cease.

The date that [NAME OF CANDIDATE] read and signed the Declaration for Licensed Candidate is [DATE].

_____
[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk
[DATE]

Receipt of a Licensed Candidate

This is to certify that [NAME OF CANDIDATE] was received under the care of the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] on [DATE], when [NAME OF CANDIDATE] read and signed the Declaration for Licensed Candidates.

_____
[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk
[DATE]

Return this receipt to the middle assembly of dismission.

18. Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament to Another Denomination

(To transfer a minister to another middle assembly within the RCA, use Formulary No. 9.)

Demission of a Minister

To the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY AND DENOMINATION]:
From the [MIDDLE ASSEMBLY NAME] of the Reformed Church in America:

This is to attest that the Rev. [FULL NAME] is a member in good and regular standing of the [MIDDLE ASSEMBLY NAME] of the Reformed Church in America, and is now requesting transfer to the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY AND DENOMINATION], to whose Christian fellowship and care [HE/SHE] is hereby affectionately commended. When received by the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY] the Rev. [LAST NAME]'s relation to this middle assembly and the Reformed Church in America shall cease.

_____
[CLERK'S NAME], Stated Clerk
[DATE]

Please complete the form below and return it to:
[NAME OF THE RCA MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]
[ADDRESS OF THE MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]

Receipt of a Minister

To the [MIDDLE ASSEMBLY NAME] of the Reformed Church in America:
From the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY AND DENOMINATION]:

This is to certify that the Rev. [FULL NAME] was received to unite with the [NAME OF RECEIVING BODY] on [DATE OF RECEPTION].

_____
[SIGNATURE OF THE OFFICER OF THE
RECEIVING BODY OF THE DENOMINATION]
[NAME AND ADDRESS OF THE RECEIVING BODY]

19. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church to Another Middle Assembly

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

To the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:
From the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:

The [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] 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 MIDDLE ASSEMBLY].

[NAME OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] 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 middle assembly.

Therefore, the [NAME OF MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] 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 MIDDLE ASSEMBLY].

When received by the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY], this church's relation to this middle assembly shall cease.

_____
[NAME OF CLERK OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY],
Stated Clerk
[DATE]

Receipt of a Church

To the [NAME OF TRANSFERRING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:
From the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY]:

This is to certify that the [NAME OF CHURCH] was received to unite with the [NAME OF RECEIVING MIDDLE ASSEMBLY] at the session of the middle assembly convened on [DATE].

_____
[NAME OF CLERK], Stated Clerk
[DATE]

REFERENCES TO THE *MINUTES OF GENERAL SYNOD*

The following References to the *Minutes of General Synod* identify all amendments to the *Book of Church Order* that become effective after December 30, 2026. Information regarding amendments that became effective prior to December 30, 2026, is available in the 2026 *Book of Church Order* Classis Version. Amendments that resulted in the edition effective as of December 30, 2026, were adopted at *MGS 2024*, RF 24-1, pp. 111-112 and *MGS 2024*, CO 24-4, pp. 247-282, and were declared approved for incorporation into the 2026 *Book of Church Order* at *MGS 2025*, EC 25-10, pp. 28-29. Due to their extensiveness, they are not cited here separately by individual sections.

A Glossary of the *Book of Church Order* of the Reformed Church in America

This glossary is designed to assist in the interpretation of the Reformed Church in America ("RCA") Book of Church Order *and is not constitutional in nature other than in its quotations. Quotation marks indicate a direct quote from the* Book of Church Order*, 2026 Middle Assembly Edition. References following each definition refer to sections of the* Book of Church Order. *This glossary was approved for use by the Commission on Church Order in July 2026.*

accusation. An allegation of an offense that has not been formally submitted as a charge. "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." (2.II.4.1) "The only matters to be considered as offenses subject to accusation are those that can be shown to be such from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America." (2.II.2.1)

adherents. "[A]ll who participate in the life, work, and worship of the church, but are not members." (Preamble)

admonition. The act of urging, warning, or correcting a person, officer, or a lower assembly requiring a person, officer, or lower assembly to account for his, her, or its action; a form of discipline that is "pastoral in nature" and is "exercised by an assembly in the ordinary course of its proceedings" or by a judicatory after considering a charge. Admonition is the mildest form of discipline. Admonishment by an assembly may be complained against; admonishment by a judicatory may be appealed. *verb* **admonish** (2.II.1.2)

advisory committee. A group of delegates that meets during General Synod to conduct the business of the General Synod as assigned by the General Synod Council and to advise the General Synod regarding the matters assigned to the committee. (3.I.8)

affiliate. *verb* The act of joining or creating a relationship with a church, assembly, or denomination. (1.I.9.1-2; 1.II.10; 1.II.14)

agencies. Those boards and institutions that have enabling documents or constitutions that have been approved by the General Synod. (3.I.7)

agent. A person or group that has been empowered to act on behalf of an assembly. Agents of General Synod have been given responsibility to endorse a minister as qualified to serve as a specialized transition minister, to supervise the Certificate of Readiness for Examination process of a candidate for ministry, and to implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod. (1.II.7.6; 1.II.11.3; 3.I.3.6b)

appeal. "[T]he transfer to a higher judicatory of a complaint, a charge, or an appeal on which judgment has been rendered in a lower judicatory." "An appeal may also be a transfer of a charge against a General Synod professor on whom a judgment has been rendered." (2.III.1.1, 2)

assembly. An administrative or legislative body consisting of the offices of the church that meets to carry out the work of the church. The three assemblies in the RCA are the consistory, the middle assembly, and the General Synod. (Preamble)

assistant minister. An ordained minister serving a congregation under contract and providing assistance for its installed minister. "The assistant minister may be commissioned by the middle assembly as a minister under contract, but shall not be ipso facto a member of the church or the consistory." (1.I.2.8; generally 1.II.7.9)

Associates in Ministry. Persons who are certified and supervised by a classis after meeting the criteria approved by General Synod for their ministry. (1.II.6.5; 1.II.18)

associate minister. An ordained minister serving a local church under a call as an installed minister along with a senior minister. Associate ministers are ipso facto members of the congregation, consistory, and board of elders. The associate minister may be elected as one of the vice presidents of the consistory. (1.I.2.5; 1.I.3.2)

baptized members. "[M]embers who have received Christian baptism, who may or may not participate at the Lord's Table, and who have not been received by the board of elders as confessing members." (Preamble)

board. A group of persons given specific responsibilities by the constitution or an assembly. The consistory is divided into a board of elders and a board of deacons. Assemblies may appoint other boards to serve the mission of the church. (Preamble)

Book of Church Order (BCO). A book that contains the *Government and the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures* of the RCA along with the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod. An appendix contains the formularies. (Preamble)

bounds. The boundaries for the ministry of the local church or the middle assembly. (1.I.5.2; 1.II.1.1; 1.II.19.1,2)

bylaws. The basic rules that provide structure for an assembly or organization; the bylaws of the General Synod are found in Chapter 3 of the BCO. The bylaws and rules of order of any church assembly must be consistent with the Government of the Reformed Church in America. (1.I.4.1)

call. An invitation by a consistory to a candidate to serve as an installed minister of the local church. The instrument of the call to a minister shall be signed by the members of the consistory and approved by the middle assembly. Ministers serving under a call are installed and are ipso facto members of the congregation and consistory. (1.I.2.3-7; Appendix, Formulary No. 5)

candidate. A person under consideration for ordination to one of the offices of the church, or a person who is being considered for a call or contract by a consistory. (1.I.2.14c1; 1.I.5.2g; 1.II.2.8; 1.II.7.7-8)

candidate for ministry. A confessing member of the Reformed Church in America who has been received under the care of a middle assembly and enrolled by the middle assembly. The middle assembly exercises a general supervision over all candidates for ministry subject to its jurisdiction and examines them for licensure and ordination. (1.II.2.7-8; 1.II.11)

certificate. A document that attests to the fact of an action. The Appendix of the *BCO* contains certificates for the transfer of ministers, church members, and churches. A Certificate of Readiness for Examination must be granted to a candidate before the candidate may be examined for licensure and ordination as a Minister of Word and Sacrament. (1.I.5.2b, 1.II.7.7-8; Appendix)

certification. The process of granting authority to exercise an office or role within the church; a statement that attests to the accuracy of a vote of a congregation or assembly. *verb* **certify** (Preamble; 1.II.10; 1.II.11.3;1.II.12; 1.II.14)

chaplain. A specialized minister that serves in an organization other than the local church or organizing church, such as a hospital, the military, or a prison. (1.I.1.4c; 1.III.3.6)

charge. "[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." "[A] charge may be brought by an individual who is subject to the jurisdiction of the responsible judicatory" or by "a committee designated by the responsible judicatory." (2.II.4.1,2,3; Appendix, Formulary No. 12)

citation. A notice signed by the president and clerk, requesting the accused person or consistory to appear before the judicatory at a specified time and place. Citations are also issued to persons who are requested to appear as witnesses for or against the accused. (2.II.5.1; 2.II.5.5; Appendix, Formulary No. 13 and No. 14)

collegiate church. "[T]wo or more congregations served and governed by a single consistory, constituting one church organization." (1.I.1)

commission. *noun* A standing committee that is given specific responsibilities and reports directly to an assembly. The General Synod has a number of commissions, and the middle assembly appoints a commission on judicial business. (3.I.5)

commission. *verb* To authorize or give approval to a form of ministry. It is appropriate to commission those who carry out a ministry of the church for which an installation is neither suitable nor required. (1.II.2.9; 1.II.15.4)

commissioned pastor. "[A]n elder who is trained, commissioned, and supervised by a middle assembly for a specific ministry within that middle assembly and under the auspices of a local church or congregation that will include the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments." (1.II.17.1)

communion. A group of churches (denomination) or the whole church of Jesus Christ as in the phrase: "the living communion of the one people of God with the one Christ who is their Head." Holy Communion is also used as a synonym for the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. (Preamble)

complaint. "[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." A complaint may be filed by confessing members against their consistory or board of elders, by members of an assembly against their assembly, or by an assembly against its supervising assembly. (2.III generally; 2.III.1.1)

confessing members. "[M]embers who have received Christian baptism and have been received by the board of elders through profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or presentation of a satisfactory certificate of transfer of membership from another Christian church, and who make faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the use of the Lord's Supper." (Preamble)

congregation. "[A] body of baptized Christians meeting regularly in a particular place of worship." (1.I.1.1a)

congregational meeting. A meeting of the confessing members of a church. It shall be called for the purpose of electing of elders and deacons and voting on a plan of union or federation. One may be called at other times when the consistory seeks the input of the congregation. (1.I.2.14; 1.I.7; 1.I.8; 1.I.2.3)

consistorial report. An annual statistical report and an assessment of the spiritual state of an organized church made by a consistory to a middle assembly, which forwards it to the General Synod. (1.I.2.19)

consistory. "[T]he governing body of a local church. Its members are the installed minister/s of that church serving under a call, the elders and deacons currently installed in office, and commissioned pastors authorized by the middle assembly." (1.I.1.1)

Constitution. The governing documents of the Reformed Church in America consisting of the Doctrinal Standards, the Liturgy with the Directory for Worship, the Government of the Reformed Church in America, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Preamble, and the Formularies. (Preamble)

constitutional inquiry. A series of questions addressed annually to the middle assembly members and elders of each church. "The answers shall be entered in the minutes of the middle assembly for the information of the General Synod." (1.II.7.1)

contract. A binding agreement that forms a working relationship between a minister, a commissioned pastor, a licensed candidate, or a student and a congregation without the use of a call or installation service. All contracts must be approved by the middle assembly and reviewed annually by the middle assembly. (1.I.2.8; 1.II.7.1n; 1.II.7.4-9)

corresponding delegate. A delegate to an assembly of the church that has the privilege of the floor but no vote. (1.III.1; 3.I.9)

deacon. A confessing member of the local church who has been inducted into that office by ordination. Installed deacons exercise a legislative function in a consistory and constitute a board of deacons with specified duties and authority, particularly the ministry of mercy, service, and outreach. (1.I.1.7-8)

delegate. *noun* One who serves as a representative to a greater assembly in the church. (1.II.3; 1.III.3; 3.I.1) An accredited delegate is one who has been officially appointed to represent the sending assembly.

delegate. *verb* To entrust authority to another. "The local churches together delegate authority to middle assemblies and 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." (Preamble)

demission. An action of the middle assembly that declares that a minister has voluntarily relinquished the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament. *verb* **demit** (1.II.15.13a & 14)

deposition. The act of removing a person from one of the offices of the church; a form of discipline that is judicial in nature and requires the formal presentation of charges to a judicatory, a determination of the truth of the charge, and a judgment of the advisability of removal from office. *verb* **depose** (1.I.1.3; 1.II.2.9; 2.II.1.2)

discipline. "[T]he exercise of the authority that 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." (2.II.1.1)

Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures. Part of the Reformed Church in America Constitution that establishes the rules for discipline and the process of filing a complaint or an appeal. (Preamble; 2)

dismission. The transfer of a member to another church, or the transfer of a licensed candidate or a minister to another middle assembly, through the use of a certificate of dismission or transfer. *verb* **dismiss** (1.I.2.18; 1.II.13.6;1. II.19.2; Appendix, Formularies 9-11)

dissolution. The termination of a pastoral relationship between an installed minister or a commissioned pastor and a church, the membership of a church in the denomination, or the corporate entity of a church. *verb* **dissolve** (1.II.2.10; 1.II.10.2,3; Appendix, Formulary No. 8)

Doctrinal Standards. The confessional statements of the RCA; namely, Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism with its Compendium, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and the Belhar Confession. (Preamble)

elder. A confessing member of the local church who has been ordained into that office. Installed elders exercise a legislative function in a consistory and constitute a board of elders with judicial authority and other specified duties, particularly the ministry of oversight and care of the church. (1.I.1.5-6)

enrolled. A designation given to certain persons as members of a group granting them certain rights and privileges. Applicants are enrolled as Candidates for Ministry after examination and approval by the middle assembly. (1.II.11; 1.II.12) RCA ministers are enrolled in the middle assembly by signing the Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament. (1.II.15.4b) Ministers from other denominations are enrolled when installed in an RCA church or upon request and with the approval of middle assembly when serving within the middle assembly. (1.I.2.4; 1.II.15.15)

excommunication. The act of refusing a person admittance to the Lord's table and hence the privileges of church membership; a form of discipline that is judicial in nature and requires the formal presentation of charges to the proper judicatory, a determination of the truth of the charge, and a judgment that the person not participate in the Lord's Supper. It requires concurrence from the middle assembly. *verb* **excommunicate** (2.II.1.2; 2.II.3.1)

federated church. A union of an RCA church with "one or more non-Reformed churches" forming "one religious corporation, with each of the original churches retaining its own religious corporation." (1.I.8)

formulary. A certificate or form that is used in the administration of the church. The formularies are found in the Appendix of the *Book of Church Order* and are constitutional in nature. (Appendix)

full communion. "Full table and pulpit fellowship and the recognition of each other's ministries, in keeping with the authority and responsibilities of the middle assemblies and the consistories." (1.I.2.4; MGS 1997, p. 185).

general superintendence. The responsibility for cognizance and supervision exercised by a greater assembly. The middle assembly exercises a "general superintendence over its enrolled ministers, its commissioned pastors, and over the interests and concerns of the congregations within its bounds" and the General Synod exercises a "general superintendence over the interests and concerns of the whole church." "Reformed governance understands that the greater assemblies care for the ministry that extends beyond the purview of the lesser assemblies without infringing upon the responsibilities of the lesser." (Preamble; 1.II.2.2; 1.III.2.1)

General Synod. The highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of minister delegates and elder delegates from each middle assembly; up to five General Synod professor of theology delegates 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. (1.III.1)

General Synod Council. The Executive Committee of the General Synod that administers the affairs of the Reformed Church in America between the sessions of the General Synod. It implements decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies. The Council also serves as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod and acts as the Board of Trustees of the General Synod as may be required by law. (1.III.7.1; 3.I.3)

governing body. The body of an organizing church "that functions similarly to both a consistory and a board of elders." In most cases it refers to a middle assembly–appointed governing body, with a few exceptions. (1.I.1.1)

great consistory. "[A]ll confessing members of that church who have served it, or are serving it, as elders and deacons on its consistory. The great consistory may be convened by the consistory when matters of special importance relating to the welfare of the church demand consideration. Members of the great consistory have only an advisory voice." (1.I.1.9)

inactive member. A person who "has not made faithful use of the means of grace, especially the hearing of the Word and the use of the Lord's Supper," and has been "removed by the board of elders from the confessing membership list." (1.I.5.2d; Preamble)

inactive minister. A minister who has been declared inactive by the middle assembly because the minister has not functioned in that office for a period of six months or more. (1.II.2.9; 1.II.15.13b)

install. To establish a person in a position or place of ministry over which the installing body has authority. Elders, deacons, ministers who have a call to serve a local church, and professors of theology are installed. noun installation (e.g., 1.II.1.1;1.I.2.3; 1.III.8.4)

judicatory. A governmental unit that exercises power to act in matters of discipline within the church. "The board of elders, the middle assembly, and the General Synod exercise judicial as well as legislative powers." An assembly becomes a judicatory when it enters into judicial proceedings. *adjective* **judicial** (Preamble)

judicial procedures. The process of considering a complaint or appeal by a judicial business committee and its judicatory. (2.III and 2.IV)

license. The permission to engage in ministry after a period of training. A middle assembly may authorize a student to preach or authorize a candidate to receive the promise of a call to ministry. (1.II.11.8; Formulary No. 2)

licensed candidate. A candidate for the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament who has been examined and approved by the middle assembly, has received the Certificate of Licensure (Formulary No. 2), and who is eligible to receive a call or other invitation to a form of ministry. (1.II.13)

Liturgy. Part of the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America containing orders for use in worship services. "The order of worship on the Lord's Day shall be in accordance with the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America, or with the principles set forth in the *Directory for Worship*…" The orders for administration of the sacraments, ordination, and installation to the offices of the church shall be used. (Preamble; 1.I.2.11a)

local church. "[A] congregation properly organized, which is served and governed by a regularly constituted consistory." (1.I.1.1c)

member. Any confessing member, baptized member, or inactive member of a local church, any minister or commissioned pastor enrolled in a middle assembly, or any voting delegate of an assembly or a judicatory. (Preamble)

middle assembly. "[A]n assembly and judicatory consisting of all the enrolled ministers of that body, commissioned pastors serving under a commission approved by the middle assembly, and the elder delegates who represent all the local and organizing churches within its bounds." The middle assembly supervises its ministers, commissioned pastors, candidates for ministry, and congregations. (1.II.1.1; generally 1.II)

minister. *noun* The commonly used term for Minister of Word and Sacrament, one of the ordained offices of the Reformed Church in America. (Preamble; 1.I.1.3)

minister. *verb* To act as a servant in the name of Christ. "The purpose of the Reformed Church in America, together with all other churches of Christ, is to minister to the total life of all people by preaching, teaching, and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and by all Christian good works." Ministry is shared by all Christians. (Preamble)

minister under contract. A minister serving a local church under a contract. The term may describe a person serving a church without an installed minister on a temporary basis, a specialized transition minister, or an assistant minister. All contracts must be approved and reviewed annually by the middle assembly. (1.II.7.4-6; 1.II.7.9; 1.I.2.8)

missionary. A person commissioned by the General Synod to serve the mission of the church in a foreign country or a new field of service. A missionary may serve as a delegate to the General Synod. (1.I.1.4c; 1.II.15.1d; 1.III.3.5)

moderator. A person who is appointed to serve as the presiding officer of one of the boards, commissions, councils, or advisory committees of the church. Moderators are given the responsibility of reporting to the General Synod. (3.II.2.6)

multiple parish. "[A] group of local churches sharing the services of one or more installed ministers." (1.I.1.1e)

offense. Misconduct subject to the discipline of the church. Offenses are "those that can be shown to be such from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America." (2.II.2.1)

office. An ordained ministry that represents Christ to the church and the world. "Three offices are employed in the governmental functions of the Reformed Church, namely, the Minister of Word and Sacrament…, 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." (Preamble)

officer. One who bears or holds an ordained office within the church; also, one who is elected or appointed to hold a particular office or role within an assembly, such as the clerk, president, presiding officer, etc. (Preamble; 1.I.3; 1.II.5; 1.III.5)

officially related. Any agency, board, or institution with an enabling document approved by the General Synod and whose governing boards include at least three members who are designated by the General Synod. (1.III.7.3; 1.III.7.5)

ordain. The action of an assembly to invest persons with authority to serve in one of the offices of the church. A consistory supervises and participates in the ordination of elders and deacons, and a middle assembly ordains Ministers of Word and Sacrament. A person is ordained only once for each office. *noun* **ordination** (1.I.2.15-16; 1.II.2.9)

order. A way to express the unity of the church and to achieve cooperation and harmony in the body of Christ in conformity with Scripture, as it seeks to fulfill its mission or as used by God in the fulfillment of God's intentions in the world. "The Reformed Church in America is organized and governed according to the presbyterial order." (Preamble)

organizing church. A congregation that has a middle assembly–appointed governing body and has not yet been organized as a local church. (1.I.1.1b)

overture. A request sent from a lower assembly to a higher assembly of the church. "The General Synod may receive overtures from a middle assembly. It shall not receive overtures that deal with matters under adjudication or that make either direct or implied charges against persons." When General Synod meets, overtures are considered by advisory committees and their advice comes to the floor, not the overture itself. If the synod votes in favor of the advisory committee's advice to deny, the overture will not receive any further consideration unless a delegate makes a motion to adopt the overture. (3.II.2.7)

parity. A principle of the equality among and within the offices of the church based upon the belief that the entire ministerial or pastoral office is summed up in Jesus Christ himself. (Preamble)

pastor. One of the ecclesiastical designations of a minister or commissioned pastor that defines the pastoral nature of his or her ministry. (1.I.1.4)

policy. A governing principle, plan, or course of action. "The General Synod alone shall determine denominational policy." (1.III.2.4)

polity. The specific form of government that is adopted by a church that provides a framework for organization. (1.III.2.11)

preaching elder. An ordained elder in the Reformed Church in America approved and commissioned by the middle assembly to preach in a particular congregation. (1.II.16)

prerogative. The spiritual authority granted to an assembly by the RCA Constitution. "Reformed governance understands that the greater assemblies care for the ministry that extends beyond the purview of the lesser assemblies without infringing upon the responsibilities of the lesser." (Preamble; 1.I.2.1; 1.II.2.1)

presbyterial. A form of church government that places authority in a series of representative assemblies of those elected and ordained to offices within the church. (Preamble)

presiding officer. An individual responsible for leading and maintaining order during a meeting, formal assembly, or judicatory. Their primary duty is to facilitate discussion, ensure established rules and procedures are followed, and make rulings on points of order or other requests. (1.I.4.5; 1.I.15.4a; 2.I.2.6; 2.I.3.1)

professor, General Synod. A Minister of Word and Sacrament who is "a teacher of the church with particular responsibilities for the preparation and certification of candidates for ministry." General Synod professors are elected and installed into that office by the General Synod and are amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod. The office of "General Synod professor" is sometimes called the "fourth office." (Preamble; 1.III.8)

quorum. The minimum number of members required to be present at a meeting before the body can transact business. All regular meetings of the assemblies and boards of the RCA require the presence of a majority of each of the offices regularly convened in order for the transaction of business. A special session of a middle assembly requires a minimum of three ministers and three elder delegates to transact the business stated in the notice of the special session. (1.I.4.2; 1.I.5.1; 1.I.6.3; 1.II.4; 1.III.4.3)

rebuke. A reprimand or censure of a member, officer, or a lower assembly; a form of discipline that is "pastoral in nature" and may be "exercised by an assembly in the ordinary course of its proceedings" or by a judicatory after considering a charge or weighing the gravity of an offense. A rebuke by an assembly may be complained against; a rebuke by a judicatory may be appealed. (2.II.1.2)

regulation. A rule or directive approved by the General Synod to "put into effect any and all articles of the Government, the Disciplinary Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America." (Rules and Amendments, Sec. 1)

restoration. Bringing back the privileges of membership or office after a period of discipline upon repentance and renewal of vows expressed before the judicatory that suspended, deposed, or excommunicated the member or officer. (2.II.6)

session. A complete unit of proceedings of an assembly that may consist of one or more connected meetings. (1.I.1.1; 1.II.4.1; 1.III.4.1)

specialized transition minister. A minister who has completed specialized training and has been endorsed as qualified by the General Synod or its designated agent. This minister may be appointed by the middle assembly to serve a church without an installed minister or senior minister for a designated period. The task of a specialized transition minister is to assist the local church in clarifying a vision for future ministry while maintaining pastoral ministry during the pastoral search process. (1.II.7.6)

supersede. The action of a middle assembly in its assembly to dissolve a consistory and any ministerial relationship "when, in its judgment, there are conditions in that church that make it unable to fulfill the functions of a local church as these are defined by the middle assembly" and set forth in the BCO. Following supersession, the middle assembly may reconstitute the consistory. (1.II.9)

supervision. The oversight and guidance of a local church or its members, a candidate for ministry, a board or agency, or an assembly of the church provided by the agency, board, or assembly given that responsibility. (1.I.2.13; 1.II.2.2; 1.II.8.3)

supervisor. A minister or elder appointed by the middle assembly to oversee "all proceedings of the consistory of a church without an installed minister." (1.II.7.3)

suspend. *verb* To set aside a privilege or action for a period of time. The action of suspension from membership or office is judicial in nature and requires the formal presentation of charges to a judicatory. (2.II.1.2)

suspension. *noun* The act of removing a person temporarily from one of the offices of the church or from the privileges of membership in the church; a form of discipline that is judicial in nature and requires the formal presentation of charges to a judicatory, the determination of the truth of the charge, and a judgment that temporary removal from office is appropriate. (2.II.3)

two-thirds majority. Several decisions listed in the BCO require a two-thirds vote of an assembly or congregation for approval. Unless this requirement mentions the "entire membership" or "those present," a two-thirds vote means at least two-thirds of the votes cast by persons entitled to vote, excluding blanks or abstentions. (*Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, 12th ed., 44:3, p. 518)

union church. *noun* A union of two or more churches of reformed bodies, that have organized consistent with the minimum requirements for a Plan of Union set forth in the *BCO*. (1.I.7)

The definitions above may change over time as the Book of Church Order *in revised. Please submit any suggestions for corrections or additions to the Commission on Church Order.*

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