

# 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 DOMINICAN REFORMED CHURCH

2009 EDITION

The Book of Church Order of the Dominican Reformed Church containing full structure of our organization, importing the structure of the Reformed Church in America "RCA".

The Book of Church Order has been adapted to the reality and context of the Dominican Reformed Church. The following leaders have worked in this hard and very important task.

### **IRD's Team**

Yeral Ogando & Elizardo González

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May 9th of 2009 the executive committee had an extraordinary assembly to work in the BCO. The executive committee agreed on using the current version for one year, until the revision team integrated by: "**Yeral Ogando, Elizardo González, Kenneth Bradsell, Luis Perez, Brigido Cabrera & Andres Serrano**" finish the final proofreading and edition.

The original version was worked in English and translated into Spanish by Yeral Ogando & Brigido Cabrera.

Taken from the English version of the RCA and translated by the Council for Hispaic Ministries (The original in Spanish is the authorized text and, therefore, it is necessary to refer to it in case of any problem of interpretation with the present text in English).

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Preamble

The purpose of the Dominican Reformed Church, 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 Dominican Reformed Church. Its Constitution consists of the Doctrinal Standards (which are the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism with its Compendium, and the Canons of the Synod of Dort and the Belhar Confession), the Liturgy the Government of the Dominican Reformed Church and the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures.

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

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 which 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 Dominican Reformed Church 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 Christian 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, classes, and synod work together in mission and ministry within their shared boundaries.

**Membership Categories and Definitions.** Membership in congregations of the Dominican Reformed Church includes "confessing" members, "baptized" members, and "inactive" members. Dominican Reformed Church 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 which Jesus Christ bestows upon his church is mediated by the Holy Spirit to all the people. 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 in 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 classes and synods, 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 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 Dominican Reformed Church 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.

## A Historical Note

The Reformed Church in America (RCA) is the former Reformed Protestant Dutch Church established by the Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam (New York City) in 1628. It is one of the oldest protestant denominations in the United States of America. Until the mid twentieth century, it had little involvement In Hispanic ministries. 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 which 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 have continued to this day as 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 the 1960's there is a record of an Hispanic last name in the New York church, from that time till 1974 some other names with Hispanic origins appears; but the Hispanic Council officially started in that date.

This new department inspite of having the name of Hispanic Council; gave the idea to church opening and receival of new Hispanic ministries; but it was not the roll of the Hispanic Council at that time. It was more like a prophetic voice for Latin matters and also to link both cultures "English-Latin".

The Hispanic Council decided to explore partnerships with some countries in Latin America, like the existent model in Mexico for many decades. That is the philosophy of mission partnership established in the RCA and currently being explored with other Latin countries.

By the mid 1990's, the leaders of the RCA Hispanic Council started to vision a possibility to expand RCA limits, in a very different way than the one already established for more than 150 years. There were new opportunities to start churches in Puerto Rico, but as Puerto Rico was part of the United States and other partners were already working there, it was not possible to get the approval from the general synod.

In 2000, a Reformed Church congregation, Church La Senda in California, along with the Hispanic Council started a new mission in Nicaragua; until now Global Mission had not recognized the "IREN", because they had been working for a long time in another Atlantic region of Nicaragua. The new church had a different vision to reach the lost and they continued struggling to be recognized.

The RCA is a Church of solid principles and they do not change course very easy inspite of their slogan "Reformed Church, always reforming according to the Word of God." There is an article in the missional policy stating that the RCA does not duplicate; meaning that new churches can only be established in North America and that every nation should start their own churches according to their habits and culture.

In the year 2000, the RCA celebrated its synod 194, at Hofstra University in Long Island, New York. It was titled "Mission 2000" the purpose of this assembly was to set up the basis for the new millennium on how the church was going to continue the ministry. The Pentecost letter was presented and also the enthusiasm of many leaders to open the door a little wider to preach the gospel of the kingdom in other places.

In the year 2004 the director for Hispanic Ministries, Rev. Brigido Cabrera was invited to Venezuela where 25 independent churches wanted to become part of the RCA; later on the Canadian executive secretary, Fred Algera, was also informed about a group of more than 27 churches in Brazil and 23 in Mozambique that wanted to become part of the RCA; through Canada or directly and other groups from Latin countries as well. On February 9, 2004, a new chapter appears in the Dominican Republic through the radio station of Rev. Andres Serrano and the Hispanic Council Ministries. Rev. Serrano started broadcasting from California, teaching the RCA standards, reformed theology, reformed government "Presbyterian" and reformed history. It was a glorious beginning bringing new feelings to Dominican pastors and leaders; thus longing to be part of a similar church.

For two and more years of reformed preaching and teaching in the Dominican Republic through Radio Impactante, the Christian community in general showed great interest for the reformed system of the RCA. Pastors, leaders, and members in general expressed their gratitude for the teachings of Rev. Serrano and longing that something of that caliber might come to the Dominican Republic.

At that time, Rev. Victor Castro was moved by the Holy Spirit for the teachings and sermons. He shared his idea with Rev. Serrano about importing the RCA system into the Dominican Republic. The idea was very interesting to Rev. Serrano and it was the beginning of the following events.

Conferences, lunches, workshops took place in different location of the country, lead by Rev. Serrano; teaching and preaching with more details to pastors and leaders the RCA reformed system; Rev. Brigido Cabrera joined the team as well; those were very rejoicing moments, a lot of information and blessings for the Dominican Republic. At all the meetings, the RCA reformed system was based on:

- Reformed Government
- Reformed Theology
- Reformed Structure
- Pastoral care and support
- Reformed History

The movement of the Spirit was so strong in the Dominican Republic that it was heard in the RCA through Rev. Andres Serrano and Rev. Brigido Cabrera; whom were moved by the Spirit of the Lord showing an interest never seen before.

In January 18 and 19, 2007, a group of RCA leaders gathered in Arizona to discuss the happenings in the Dominican Churches. That group was formed by:

1. Rev. Bruce Menning, RCA Director of Global Mission
2. Rev. Luis Pérez, RCA Executive Ministry for Mid-Atlantic Synod
3. Rev. Andrés Serrano, Pastor Iglesia La Senda & Director of Radio Impactante
4. Rev. Brigido Cabrera, RCA Coordinator for Hispanic Ministries
5. Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaleson, RCA General Secretary
6. Rev. Tim Vink, RCA Coordinator for Church Multiplication
7. Rev. Richard Welscott, RCA Director of Development
8. Rev. Charles Van Engen, RCA Missional Professor — Feller Theological Seminary and former RCA President
9. Rev. Jeffrey Japinga, RCA Executive Coordinator

This group of leaders discussed the feeling of the Dominican pastors and leaders to be part of the RCA; they saw this as a great opportunity to build a strong reformed presence in Latin America.

One of the main questions was: what do we know about the group in the Dominican Republic? How did it come to join the RCA? At that moment Rev. Serrano explained the work he has been doing for many years through his radio ministry and the existent link with many pastors and churches in the Dominican Republic; the participation of Hispanic Ministries as well as the Synod of New York with Rev. Jon Norton.

The hunger and thirst in Latin America for a Presbyterian government came up, reformed theology as well; knowing that 80% per cent of the churches are of Pentecostal origins, having a big varieties of beliefs; creating divisions due to the traditional governmental system, thus being forced to look out for a different government system than the current one; which has been affecting the country for many years.

Rev. Bruce Menning presented the historic moments of global mission and the relationship with other churches outside of the United States.

Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaleson recognized the blessings through the ministry of Rev. Andres Serrano and brought up the possible goal to establish a reformed church in the Dominican Republic, with the historic principles of the RCA mission.

At the same time they recognized this process as a completely new model for the RCA. Therefore transparency in this new partnership is essential.

The tensions between the Dominican and Haitian community in the Dominican Republic was also presented and the possibility to be able to help in the justice and reconciliation of the Dominican and Haitian churches was expressed.

The key point was to establish a Dominican Reformed Church that could be able to decide how to work, such as:

- Governmental Order
- Structure
- Pastoral and leader support

In this meeting Global Mission was assigned as the direct contact with the emergent Church in the Dominican Republic in order to create a long term partnership, so we can define how the new partnership will work between the RCA and the churches in the Dominican Republic.

**On January 18 and 19, 2007, at Scottsdale, Arizona the partnership between the RCA and what we know today as the Dominican Reformed Church (IRD) was authorized.**

As the presence of the Haitian community is necessary in this new partnership, Rev. Andres Serrano invited Rev. Yeral Ogando to represent the Haitian community in this new movement of the Spirit of God.

After many meetings and conferences, on Wednesday, July 10, 2007 at 7:00 pm, in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, what was long expected finally happened. The new executive committee for the synod of the Dominican Reformed Church (IRD) was formed by:

1. Victor Castro            President
2. Ignacio Diaz            Vice- President
3. Nancy Cabrera        Treasurer
4. Elizardo González    Legal Department
5. Juan Cruz              Treasurer Assistant
6. Julio Cesar Díaz      Representant of Puerto Plata Zone
7. Ruperto Medina       Representant of Barahona Zone
8. Nelson Polanco        Social-Community Projects
9. Yeral Ogando         Secretary for the executive committee

With such an important event, the information was immediately sent to the RCA leaders where the communications and information started to flow more openly between both denominations.

Congratulations were received from the RCA, Global Mission, Hispanic Ministry and Synod of New York.

In all the communications the goal was to establish the type of partnership between the IRD and the RCA, from a very realistic perspective.

Even after this announcement the IRD and the RCA continued to explain the partnership differently. On one side some leaders in the RCA thought that the IRD wanted a Church Association. The IRD stressed that it intended to be a REFORMED DENOMINATION. In other words, the intend is that the general synods of the IRD and the RCA work as sister to develop reformed churches in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, throughout the Carribean, Latin America and around the world.

On November 11 and 12, 2007, an IRD and RCA commission gathered: Rev. Andres Serrano, Rev. Jon Norton, Rev. Bruce Menning, Rev. Luis Pérez, Rev. Víctor Castro, Rev. Elizardo Gonzalez, Rev. Yeral Ogando and others. It was a very joyful moment for both denominations. The IRD presented to the RCA what the IRD was looking for; expressed as follows.

Create the Reformed Denomination in the Dominican Republic based on:

- RCA Polity & Structure
- Reformed Theology
- Pastoral care & support

The conclusion was something unforgettable for both denominations; the RCA named this day as "the pig meeting" because the IRD as host served roasted pig for the visitors. The events that followed that gathering have been tremendous.

On November 26, 2007, we received the request to present to the RCA the IRD vision and mission, taking into account the following points:

- Vision
- Current realities of the IRD and in the Dominican Republic
- Goals and Objectives
- Implementation
- Evaluation

The IRD presented the vision and mission to the RCA, creating our second meeting with a strategy and implementation team led by Helen Monsees and Sheila Kiscaden on April 11 and 12, 2008. In this meeting the vision and mission that the IRD had already presented was confirmed, defining it as: **A church** united in reformed theology, which provides support & development for its pastors; that lives out its faith through discipleship, evangelism and the work of social justice; and is a living, growing presence of Jesus Christ in the Dominican Republic and in the world.

Five key points are,

- Reformed Theology
- Evangelism and Discipleship.
- Ministerial development and support
- Social Justice
- Sustainable and Vibrant church

The year of 2008 continued with many expectations and great flow of communication between the IRD and the RCA. Then the IRD extended a formal invitation to the RCA General Secretary, Rev. Wesley Grandberg-Michaelson and to Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, Assistant Secretary, Director of Operations and Support.

On January 11 and 12 , 2009, an historic date for the IRD; the General Secretary of the RCA, Rev. Wesley Grandberg-Michaelson; Rev. Kenneth Bradsell, Assistant Secretary, Director of Operations and Support; Rev. Jon Norton, Executive Minister of New York Synod; Rev. Luis Pérez Executive Minister of Mid-Atlantic Synod; Rev. Brígido Cabrera, Hispanic Ministries Coordinator; Rev. Andrés Serrano; Director Radio Impactante; along with an IRD Team, Rev. Victor Castro, President; Rev. Ignacio Díaz, Vice-president; Rev. Juan Cruz, Assistant Treasurer; Rev. Nelson Polanco, Social-Community projects; Rev. Félix Caraballo, Mints Coordination in the DR and Reporter of a Christian newspaper; Frank Castillo, IRD Guest and Rev. Yeral Ogando, Secretary of the executive committee. The representatives of the two denominations agreed on signing a legal agreement showing the eternal partnership between the two denominations. The main points of the agreement were:

1. RCA commitment with the IRD to evangelize the Dominican Republic, including: Reformed Theology & Education for the IRD pastors and leaders, focusing on mission and ministry.
2. Leadership training.

3. Seriousness and commitment from the IRD and the RCA to totally work together for the vision and mission of the IRD; to enrich the kingdom of God through the IRD in the Dominican Republic and beyond.

From January 26-30, 2009, the first office for the IRD was created at Winston Churchill with Sarasota, plaza universitaria, local 9B. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic; represented by the IRD Secretary of executive committee, Rev. Yeral Ogando; being the first full-time officer of the IRD.

### **Incorporation of the General Synod**

The General Synod of the Dominican Reformed Church was incorporated on April 26, 2008, in the Dominican Republic; as a non profit private organization; with the resolution of incorporation number 0042 dated July 18, 2008. The government of the Dominican Republic assigned the RCN: 430071455 to the IRD, also known in the United States as the Federal Tax ID in order to fully operate as a legal non profit private organization. An act of the legislature of the Dominican Republic signed by the governor authorized the general synod with 9 directors of the corporation.

The General Synod of Dominican Reformed Church shall be and hereby is declared to be a body corporate and politic by the name and style of "*The Dominican Reformed Church*" 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.

Part I

*The Consistory*

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**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, and the elders and deacons currently installed in office. A consistory is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through committees.

- a. A congregation is a body of baptized Christians meeting regularly in a particular place of worship.
- b. A local church is a congregation properly organized, and it is served and governed by a regularly constituted consistory.

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 that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Dominican Reformed Church. They are equal in authority as ministers and as stewards of the mysteries of God. Ministers shall ordinarily be confessing members of only the Dominican Reformed Church, except as otherwise provided in Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 1 and in Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 4. No person who has relinquished the ministry for which installed 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. In the local church the minister serves as 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, 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.

Sec. 5. The office of the minister in a specialized ministry is to serve as 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 classis. 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.

Sec. 6. Proper ecclesiastical designation of ministers should accord with the nature of their ministry, such as pastor, teacher, missionary, chaplain, president, executive secretary, or director.

Sec. 7. 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 Dominican Reformed Church.

Sec. 8. 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, 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 by the minister/s 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. 9. 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 Dominican Reformed Church.

Sec. 10. 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. 11. 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 act in all matters calling for judgment and decision which are not specifically assigned to the board of elders or to the board of deacons.

Sec. 2. The consistory shall regularly consider 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, classes, and synod.

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, No. 5.) If the call is approved by the classis 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 classis may waive the three successive Sundays requirement.) If no such objections are raised, the classis or its committee shall install the minister according to the office for installation in the Liturgy.

Sec. 4. A consistory that calls more than one minister to serve the congregation shall issue a separate call to each minister.

Sec. 5. A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Formulary #5) for all ministers serving the church full-time under call or contract through participation in the retirement and insurance programs of the Dominican Reformed Church.

Sec. 6. A consistory or its minister may request the classis to terminate the minister's relationship to that church. (See Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 8.)

Sec. 7. 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. 8. 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 Dominican Reformed Church 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 Office 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" shall be read. All baptized Christians present who are admitted to the Lord's Supper are to be invited to participate.
- d. The songs & Hymns used in public worship shall be in harmony with the Standards of the Dominican Reformed Church.
- e. The consistory of a church may invite or permit ministers of other denominations whose character and standard are known to preach for them. Ministers of other denominations or their counterparts whose character and standard are not known shall not be engaged to preach in a local church until they have furnished to the consistory written evidence of recent date of their good ministerial standing and of their authorization to preach the Word. The consistory shall then determine whether to issue an invitation to preach the Word.
- f. The points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism 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. 9. 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. 10. 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 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 classis of which the church is a member has been secured. Further, the consistory shall not incur a total indebtedness which exceeds two-thirds of the prior year's expenditures for congregational purposes, as reported to the General Synod, without the approval of classis.

Sec. 11. 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 , at least 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 (see f. below).
- 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.
- d. The method employed by a church shall not be changed except by permission of classis.
- 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 classis 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 classis 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 (see b. above); 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. 12. The names of the persons elected as elders and deacons shall be announced 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. 13. 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. 14. 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 Christian 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. 15. 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. 16. The consistory shall make a statistical report at the meeting of classis immediately preceding the stated meetings of 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 Dominican Reformed Church. 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 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 classis. 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 classis 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 classis whenever the classis 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 which 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 classis 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 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.
- g. It shall not penalize nor permit to be penalized any member for conscientious objection to or support of the ordination of women to church offices; nor shall it permit any member to obstruct by unconstitutional means the election, ordination, or installation of women to church offices.

Sec. 3. At each regular meeting, the board of elders shall seek to determine whether any members of the congregation are: in need of special care regarding their spiritual condition and/or

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 1. Classis Defined**

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

### **Article 2. Responsibilities of the Classis**

Sec. 1. The classis shall exercise a general superintendence over its enrolled ministers and over the interests and concerns of the churches within its bounds, and shall enforce the requirements of the Government of the Dominican Reformed Church.

Sec. 2. The classis shall regularly consider the nature and extent of ministry within its bounds in obedience to Holy Scripture and in response to the needs of the world within which the classis ministers. The classis may form such entities as may be needed for the ministry of the church, provided such bodies do not infringe upon the prerogatives of other classes, consistories, or the general synod.

Sec. 3. The classis shall exercise original and appellate supervisory power over the acts, proceedings, and decisions of the boards of elders and consistories, both in temporal matters and in those relating to Christian discipline.

Sec. 4. The classis shall form, dissolve, and disband churches.

Sec. 5. The classis shall have the authority to transfer a local church to another denomination, together with all or part of its real and personal property with the approval of the general synod.

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

Sec. 7. The classis shall exercise a general supervision over all students of theology subject to its jurisdiction.

Sec. 8. The classis shall examine those men and women who are students of theology for licensure, and licensed candidates for the ministry for ordination.

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

Sec. 10. The classis shall approve and disapprove calls, and effect and dissolve the relationship between ministers and churches.

Sec. 11. The classis shall exercise all ecclesiastical functions in accord with the Government of the Dominican Reformed Church which are not specifically delegated to other assemblies.

### **Article 3. Elder Delegates**

Sec. 1. A church with a hundred and fifty or fewer confessing members shall have one elder delegate and an elder delegate for each additional a hundred and fifty confessing members or fraction thereof. A church shall not have more than four such elder delegates. A church without an installed minister shall have an elder delegate who shall not be counted as one of the above delegates.

Sec. 2. The elder delegate to classis shall be chosen from the entire body of elders in a church, whether or not presently a member of the board of elders.

Sec. 3. The elder delegate shall be a member of classis from the date of election or appointment and shall continue in that responsibility to classis 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 classis.

### **Article 4. Sessions of Classis**

Sec. 1. Stated sessions of classis shall be held at least annually at such times as the classis may determine. All classis sessions 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 majority of the elder delegates and a majority of those ministers who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis is required.

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

### **Article 5. Officers of Classis**

Sec. 1. The president shall preside at classis sessions. 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 classis 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 classis. The clerk shall also be responsible

for forwarding to the denominational archives the minutes of the classis and subsidiary corporations, all papers pertaining to disbanded churches, and all papers of the classis should the classis disband.

#### **Article 6. Transaction of Business**

Sec. 1. The classis 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 Dominican Reformed Church.

Sec. 2. A member of classis 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 classis shall also have the right to request that the names of all classis members, with their votes for or against a matter in question, be recorded in the minutes of the classis for the information of all; however, that request may be denied by a two-thirds majority of the classis.

Sec. 3. Only duly accredited delegates to classis shall be entitled to vote.

Sec. 4. Except as otherwise provided in the Book of Church Order, members of classis committees, commissions, or boards shall be confessing members of the churches in the classis.

#### **Article 7. Superintendence of the Churches**

Sec. 1. The president of classis, at the same meeting at which delegates to the synod are appointed, shall address the following inquiries to the ministers and elder delegates of each church. The answers shall be entered in the minutes of classis for the information of the synod:

- a. Are the doctrines of the gospel preached in your church in their purity in conformity with
  - i. the Word of God?
  - ii. the Standards of the Dominican Reformed Church?
- b. Are the points of doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism explained in your church from time to time, as required by the Government of the Dominican Reformed Church?
- c. Is the education of the young people in the essential truths of the Word of God carried on by catechising, or is it otherwise faithfully attended to in your congregation?
- d. Has the consistory prayerfully considered persons within the congregation, especially the young people, in order to identify with them their gifts for ministry of Word and sacrament, to encourage the development of these gifts, and to pray for those individuals on a regular basis?
- e. Is care and visitation faithfully performed in your congregation by

- i. elders?
  - ii. deacons?
  - iii. minister/s?
- f. Does the board of elders fulfill the requirements contained in the Book of Church Order, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 5, Sections 3 and 4?
- g. Do the salary, housing, arrangements for professional development, and all other benefits received by the minister/s meet the terms of the original call or contract, subsequent revisions thereof, and the minimum standards of the classis?
- h. Does the consistory regularly review the performance of
- i. the consistory?
  - ii. the board of elders?
  - iii. the board of deacons?
  - iv. the installed minister/s?
- i. Is your church fulfilling its stewardship obligation by contributing annually and significantly to the mission programs of
- i. the denomination?
  - iii. the classis?
- j. Is your church engaged in significant, regular activities which faithfully witness to the gospel and which challenge others to respond to God's Spirit in a faith commitment to Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord?

Sec. 2. The classis 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 classis shall appoint one of its ministers as supervisor of all proceedings of the consistory of a church without a minister or senior minister. The supervisor shall attend all formal meetings of the consistory, due notice having been given.

Sec. 4. The classis, at the request of a church or with its consent, shall appoint one of its ministers or a minister of another classis, 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 classis. The minister under contract shall perform the duties and receive the financial support which is agreed upon and shall report to classis whenever that body shall require it.

Sec. 5. The classis shall determine whether a minister under contract who is also a member of the classis 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 classis may appoint a theological student to a church without an installed minister or a minister under contract, to furnish the service for which the student is

qualified. Before the appointment is made, the student must secure the approval of the appointment by the school the student attends.

Sec. 7. A church shall not enter into a contract with a minister, a licensed candidate, or a student except by approval of the classis. Between sessions of classis the approval may be given by the president and the clerk of the classis.

Sec. 8. The approval of the classis shall be required before a church and a competent minister, or ministers, may contract for the purpose of maintaining public worship, under that church'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 classis shall review all contracts annually. Ministers employed by such contracts may or may not be required to be members of the classis.

Sec. 9. The classis, in exercising its authority to form new churches, shall provide elders who will:

- a. Oversee the administration of the sacraments and admit persons as members of a newly formed congregation. The classis shall administer the membership of that congregation until such time as that congregation shall be properly organized as a church.
- b. Meet with those persons who desire to be organized into a church. The classis shall determine that the organizational document of the church includes a provision substantially in the form of Formulary 15. Notice of the time and place of the proposed organization and of the election of elders and deacons, shall be published for three Sundays in the church or usual place of worship. The ordination of elders and deacons shall follow the regular procedure. The first elders and deacons of a newly organized church shall determine by lot, at the first meeting of the consistory following upon their installation, who of their number shall serve for one year, two years, and three or more years.

Sec. 10. The classis 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 which make it unable to fulfill the functions of a local church as these are defined by the classis. 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. Neglect of the physical condition of the church properties.

- f. Insufficiency of confessing membership to fulfill the purposes and responsibilities of an organized church.
- g. Long-term or rapid decline in participation or membership.
- h. Inability to provide adequate ministerial services.

Sec. 11. Before superseding a consistory, the classis shall state its intention and summon the consistory of that church 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 classis. If the classis, after having heard the consistory, continues in its intention, it shall dissolve the consistory and otherwise terminate the formal organization of that church and take such steps as may be necessary to bring that church, its ministry, and its property under the direct administration of the classis. Such a church shall not have a consistory, but the classis shall designate those persons, not necessarily members of that church, who 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. All actions of the classis under this section shall require a two-thirds vote of a quorum present consisting of a majority of the elder delegates and a majority of those ministers who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction of the classis.

Sec. 12. When the classis has superseded a consistory, it shall have the authority, in the exercise of its discretion and in accordance with the laws of the Dominican Republic, 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 classis shall determine.

All actions of the classis under this section shall require a two-thirds vote of the members present.

Sec. 13. The classis shall have the authority to reconstitute the consistory of a church when, in the judgment of the classis, sufficient growth has been achieved or suitable stability created so that the church can continue ministry without classis administration. The classis shall guide the consistory selection process (Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 14).

Sec. 14. Following the approval of the general synod, the classis, in formally disbanding a church, shall be satisfied that each and all of the following conditions have been fulfilled:

- a. The sale and transfer of all physical properties of the church.
- b. The transfer of all financial assets to the classis, and the assumption by the classis 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 classis of all formal church records, and all other records and documents in its possession.

Sec. 15. Whenever a church is disbanded or dissolved, all real and personal property shall thereupon become vested in the classis of which the church is a member, upon the assumption by the classis of all that church's outstanding obligations, provided the laws of the country in which the church is located permit this procedure. If the classis 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. 16. 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 classis of the petition for a withdrawal, as well as the required contribution to the IRD 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. 17. 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 classis 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 classis from which the right of withdrawal was received.

Sec. 18. The classis, in exercising its authority to receive a congregation as a local church of the Dominican Reformed Church, 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 Dominican Reformed Church.
- 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 Dominican Reformed Church, and would be welcomed as such by the other churches of the classis; and
- d. such congregation has adopted an organizational document that includes a provision substantially in the form of Formulary 15.

### **Article 8. Supervision of Students of Theology**

Sec. 1. A confessing member of a congregation in the Dominican Reformed Church who desires to become a minister shall apply to the classis with jurisdiction over the church in which membership is held to be enrolled as a candidate for the 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 classis or its committee for examination. The classis or its committee shall inquire into the applicant's character and behavior; physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and educational qualifications; and the motives which led the applicant to seek the ministry as a vocation. If the classis is satisfied by the examination, the applicant shall be received under its care and enrolled as a candidate for the ministry.

Sec. 3. The candidate shall be under the supervision of the classis while preparing for ordination, but shall remain subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the board of elders of the church in which membership is held. The classis shall show a continuing sympathetic interest by appointing a committee for each candidate to guide the candidate's study program and practical training.

Sec. 4. If the candidate's membership is transferred to a church under the jurisdiction of another classis, enrollment shall likewise be transferred to that classis. However, upon completion of seminary training, the candidate shall be examined for licensure and ordination by the classis in which church membership was held upon entering seminary studies, unless in the judgment of said classis it is appropriate for examination for licensure and ordination to be administered by the classis in which the candidate is presently enrolled. The approval of both classes shall be required to permit the classis in which the candidate is enrolled to administer the examinations.

Sec. 5. As the candidate pursues theological education, the classis 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 Dominican Reformed Church; (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. 6. The classis shall examine the candidate for licensure and ordination. The classis shall satisfy itself that the candidate is competent in: (1) theology; (2) the nature and administration of the sacraments; (3) knowledge of and adherence to the Constitution (the Standards, the Government and Disciplinary Procedures, and the Liturgy) of the Dominican Reformed Church; and (4) the history and program of Reformed Church mission.

Sec. 7. Provided the classis is satisfied with the candidate's progress toward ordination, it shall grant to the candidate each year a provisional license to preach under the supervision of the General Synod. 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. 8. The candidate shall have a bachelor's degree or its academic equivalent upon the successful completion of the prescribed course of theological studies.

## **Article 9. Certificates of Fitness for Ministry**

### **Sec. 1. Other Candidates**

A candidate for the ministry who has not received a bachelor's degree or a degree that is its equivalent from a theological school may be assessed by a consistory as to the candidate's call, gifts, and experience in accordance with the standards requisite for the ministry of Word and sacrament. The consistory shall apply to the classis on the candidate's behalf.

The classis shall determine: (1) the candidate has at least five years' experience in leadership in the church; (2) the consistory has demonstrated compelling need for the candidate's ministry; (3) the candidate gives evidence of the call, gifts, and experience for the ministry of Word and sacrament; and (4) the candidate, for compelling practical reasons, cannot complete a bachelor's degree at an accredited theological school.

The classis shall form a committee to care for and to guide the candidate through his or her program.

## **Article 10. Supervision of Licensure and Ordination**

Sec. 1. Upon classis approval of an examination for licensure and ordination, the candidate shall sign the Declaration for Licensed Candidates (see Appendix, 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 classis, shall be issued for a period of five years, and shall be subject to renewal by that classis. The license may be revoked by that classis at any time on request of the candidate, or for due cause.

Sec. 2. The licensed candidate for the ministry shall remain under the immediate direction of the examining classis. The candidate shall visit such congregations and preach in such places as the classis 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 the 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 classis only after the candidate has received and accepted a call or other invitation to a form of ministry which meets all of the following requirements:

- a. A ministry which requires a theological education for its performance.
- b. Performed under the jurisdiction or with the approval of a classis of the Dominican Reformed Church.
- 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 classis shall appoint a time for the ordination service of the candidate. An interval of at least fifteen days following the candidate's examination is required before the service of ordination. That service shall be conducted by the classis in regular 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 (Formulary #4), signed by the president and the stated clerk of the classis, shall be given and the minister so ordained shall be enrolled as a member of the classis.

Sec. 6. A licensed candidate who seeks ordination in a classis other than that in which the candidate's church is a member shall apply for a certificate of dismissal as a licensed candidate to that classis. The certificate shall be granted if the candidate is in good standing.

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

#### **Article 11. Reception of Ministers and Licensed Candidates from Other Denominations**

Sec. 1. A classis 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 Christian 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 classis shall not receive any licensed candidate or minister under its care from any body of professing Christians which maintains doctrines opposed to those of the

Standards of the Dominican Reformed Church, 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 classis by a licensed candidate or a minister from another denomination, the classis shall determine whether the applicant's educational qualifications are equal to those required in the Dominican Reformed Church, and it shall subject the applicant to such examination before classis as shall demonstrate the applicant's understanding of the theology, history, government, and disciplinary procedures of the Dominican Reformed Church; understanding of and adherence to the Standards of the Dominican Reformed Church; and loyalty to its agencies.

## **Article 12. Supervision of Ministers of Word and Sacrament**

Sec. 1. A classis within the geographic area of service in which a minister serves in an IRD congregation or in a specialized ministry shall be the classis 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:

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

Sec. 3. The classis 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 classis deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the classis annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The classis shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Formulary #5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its ministers serving full-time in congregations or employed by an assembly, institution, or agency of the Dominican Reformed Church under call or contract.

Sec. 4. The classis shall install only those ministers who serve under a call.

- a. All ministers shall be responsible to a classis which shall oversee their function as pertains to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament (see also Section 2 and Section 6 in Article 12).
- b. When ministers move from one classis to another, they shall sign the formulary (#3) "Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament" in the classis which they join.

Sec. 5. The classis 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 classis, a minister received from another denomination.

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 classis 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 classis or a synod.

Sec. 7. A minister of the classis 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 classis, 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 classis 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 classis 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 classis with a written report (Formulary #8). The latter shall serve as the basis upon which the action of the classis 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 classis until a hearing of both minister and consistory has been conducted in open classis. The president of the classis shall give ten days' notice of such hearing to both parties. The warrant for the notice and for the call of classis 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 classis present.

Sec. 9. A minister who moves from the bounds of one classis into another shall request a Certificate of Dismission from the classis where membership is held. The Certificate of Dismission shall be presented prior to the approval of the minister for reception into the new classis. That classis shall notify the sending classis 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 classis shall terminate the relationship at a special meeting, or not later than the next regular meeting. The classis shall then appoint a supervisor over the church, unless other contractual relations approved by the classis 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 classis. 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 classis, declare to be minister emeritus a former minister of its congregation.

Sec. 12. The classis shall keep a record book in which the declarations for licensed candidates 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 classis.

Sec. 13.

- a. A person who has been ordained to the office of minister may voluntarily relinquish the office by demission, but only after application to, and with the consent of, the classis of which the person is a member. The classis, 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 classis and, if requested, transfer the person to the membership and care of a local church.
- b. A minister who because of ill health, incapacity, lack of opportunity, or other reason deemed sufficient by the classis, has not functioned in that office for a period of six months may be declared inactive by the classis. When a minister has not functioned in that office due to lack of opportunity, the classis 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 classis 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 classis may proceed with the presentation and trial of the charge of desertion of office, with the possibility of suspension or deposition from office.

Sec. 14. When a person who has been declared demitted from the office of minister shall seek to enter upon a function appropriate to the office (Article 10, Section 4, above), the classis of membership at the time of demission shall administer such examination as it deems necessary. If satisfied by the examination, that classis shall reordain the person.

Sec. 15. A minister of another denomination whose ordination meets the criteria of Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, Section 1, whose good standing has been certified by that denomination, and who serves with the approval of classis as a minister under contract, an assistant minister, a minister in a cooperative specialized ministry in which classis shares sponsorship, or a minister to a congregation composed of denominational units at least one of which is associated with the classis, or an installed minister, may upon request and with the approval of classis, hold temporary membership in the classis. Such temporary members shall have the rights and privileges of membership for the period of the approved service, but may not represent their classis in the higher judicatories, assemblies, agencies, or commissions of the Dominican Reformed Church.

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

### **Article 13. Commissioned Pastors**

Sec. 1. A commissioned pastor is an elder who is trained, commissioned, and supervised by a classis for a specific ministry within that classis 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. A consistory may recommend a confessing member of a Reformed church to the classis as a candidate to become a commissioned pastor.

Sec. 3. Upon acceptance of the consistory's application on behalf of a candidate, the classis shall approve and supervise a training plan for that person. The classis 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 Dominican Reformed Church (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.

Sec. 4. The classis shall employ standards established by the General Synod in determining a candidate's ministerial competence.

Sec. 5. Upon satisfaction by the classis of the candidate's ministerial competence, the classis shall identify the specific form of commissioned service appropriate to the gifts and training of the candidate. When the classis receives an invitation for a ministry it deems appropriate for the candidate, the classis shall 1) authorize the ministry, 2) approve a contract, and 3) commission the candidate to the authorized ministry to the extent of the contract.

Sec. 6. The classis shall assign a mentor for each commissioned pastor for the period of training and ministry.

Sec. 7. The commissioned pastor shall be authorized to preach the Word and celebrate the sacraments. The classis may authorize the commissioned pastor to any or all of the following functions:

- a. Serve as presiding officer of the consistory, at the request of a consistory or with its consent, under the supervision of the classis supervisor.
- b. Preside at the ordination and installation of elders and deacons.

Sec. 8. The commissioned pastor shall be a temporary member of classis, but shall not serve as an elder delegate, during the period of commissioned service.

Sec. 9. The classis shall evaluate the performance of the commissioned pastor at least annually.

Sec. 10. The commissioned pastor shall remain a member of a local church, but is amenable solely to the discipline of the classis as set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 3 of the Book of Church Order, for the period of commissioned service.

#### **Article 14. Relation to General Synod**

Sec. 1. The classis shall report annually to the General Synod upon the state of religion within the bounds of the classis. Such statistics as the General Synod shall require from time to time shall be presented in tabular form.

Sec. 2. The classis shall report annually to the 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 since the last session of the general synod.

Sec. 3. The classis shall appoint delegates to the General Synod.

### Part III

### *The General Synod*

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#### **Article 1. General Synod Defined**

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Dominican Reformed Church. It consists of the minister delegates and elder delegates from each of the classes in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Executive Committee.

#### **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 alone shall determine denominational policy. It may delegate the formulation of policy to committees, boards, or other agencies.

Sec. 4. 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. 5. The General Synod shall be the legal custodian of the funds, devises, bequests and other property which is given, devised, or bequeathed directly to the General Synod of the Dominican Reformed Church, or to or for the use of its various unincorporated funds.

Sec. 6. The General Synod shall have original authority over all matters pertaining to doctrine and denominational polity as they relate to the theological education in the Dominican Reformed Church.

Sec. 7. The General Synod shall exercise responsibility in the oversight of standards for the preparation of candidates for the ministry of Word and sacrament.

Sec. 8. 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 all people, and to conduct its missionary, educational, and benevolent work effectively.

Sec. 9. The General Synod shall recommend to the churches such methods as shall effectively sustain the denominational program, and official communications, and which tend to secure the largest dissemination of the gospel.

Sec. 10. The General Synod may cause corporations to be formed retaining original authority in matters of denominational polity. Such corporations shall be maintained according to the laws of the Dominican Republic, so that they may receive, hold, and transfer property, and facilitate the carrying out of the responsibilities committed to them.

### **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 classis represented or confessing membership in a church within the classis represented shall be terminated during the period of appointment, the delegate shall cease to be a member of the 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 classis as soon as possible. Upon notification by the stated clerk, the alternate delegate shall assume the rights and responsibilities of the appointment.

### **Article 4. Sessions and Meetings of General Synod**

Sec. 1. The General Synod shall meet annually at such time and place as shall have been determined at its previous session. 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 secretary of the executive committee of the synod upon the joint application of three ministers and three elders from

each of the classes, all of them serving currently as accredited delegates to the General Synod. Three weeks' notice of the session shall be given to the members of the synod, such notice to state the purpose of the session.

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. The president is the person who has been elected president of the executive committee. the president shall undertake such duties as may be assigned by the general 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 classes, and to make proposals for future action. The president shall be a member of the General Synod until a successor has been elected by the executive committee.

Sec. 2. The vice-president is the person elected vice-president by the executive committee.

Sec. 3. The General Synod shall have a secretary, who is secretary of the executive committee. The duties of the secretary shall be to maintain the minutes and records of the General Synod, to handle all correspondence and to assist the president and vice president in the formation of the agenda and schedule of the agenda and schedule of the meeting. The secretary shall have such other duties as assigned by the executive committee.

### **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 which are in accord with the Government of the Dominican Reformed Church. The General Synod shall be incorporated.

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

Sec. 1. The General Synod Executive Committee is established by and responsible to the General Synod. It shall administer the affairs of the Dominican Reformed Church between the sessions of the General Synod. It shall implement decisions, policies, and programs of the General Synod through proper channels and agencies, 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 the executive committee 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, which 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 Dominican Reformed Church, with its amendments, shall be approved by the General Synod.

Sec. 4. The members of all incorporated organizations shall be elected by the General Synod.

*Rules and Amendments of The*

*Government of the Dominican Reformed  
Church and Disciplinary Procedures*

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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 Dominican Reformed Church.

Sec. 2. Amendments to the Government, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy shall be made only upon adoption by the General Synod at a stated meeting, with recommendation to the classes for approval. At least two-thirds of the classes shall approve a proposed amendment in order to secure its adoption. If an amendment is approved by the classes, the General Synod, at its discretion, may pass a final declarative resolution on the amendment. When the declarative action has taken place, the amendment shall become effective.

CHAPTER 2

THE DISCIPLINARY

AND JUDICIAL

PROCEDURES

Part I

*Discipline*

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**Article 1. Nature of Discipline**

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

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

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

Sec. 1. The only matters to be considered as offenses subject to accusation are those which can be shown to be such from the Holy Scriptures, or from the Constitution of the Dominican Reformed Church.

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

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

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

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

All members of a local church are under its care and are subject to its government and discipline, as administered by its board of elders. The board of elders may suspend from the privileges of membership in the church a member who persistently rejects its admonitions or rebukes. If a member fails to show marks of repentance after suspension, the board of elders may, with permission of the classis, proceed to excommunication. The board of elders shall publicly notify the congregation of its intention to excommunicate, and later, 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.

### **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 Section 1 of this article.

### Sec. 3. Discipline of a Minister of Word and Sacrament

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

### Sec. 4. Discipline of a Consistory

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

## **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 No. 12). The clerk of the judicatory shall provide a copy of the charge to the accused within three days of its receipt.

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.

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

Sec. 4. If filed by an individual, the charge shall be referred to a 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:

- 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. If the alleged offense occurred more than two years prior to the date of the charge, the charge shall be dismissed by the committee except when the committee concludes that circumstances prevented the accusation from being brought earlier.

- c. Shall determine whether efforts to resolve the matter short of trial would be appropriate. Such efforts may include mediation, admission by the accused that the charge is true and acceptance of appropriate sanctions, or any other disposition to which the committee and the accused may agree. Any demission, suspension, deposition, or excommunication must be approved by the appropriate judicatory.

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 by the judicatory.

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

## **Article 5. Trying a Charge**

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, No. 13) signed by the president and 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.

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.

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

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

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

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

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.

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 Dominican Reformed Church. Counsel shall not be compensated for their time or efforts but may be reimbursed for expenses.

#### 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 Dominican Reformed Church, nor any person connected with the case, shall circulate, or cause to be circulated, any written or printed arguments or briefs upon any charges before the final disposition of same, including appeals, if any.
- c. The required quorum for a judicatory conducting a trial shall be the same as is required for a regular or stated session of that assembly.
- d. The accuser shall be responsible for moving forward with the evidence.
- e. The charge(s) must be proven with a high degree of probability.
- f. 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.
- g. 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.
- h. 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.

## Sec. 12. Decision

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

## Sec. 13. 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 Dominican Reformed Church.
- b. The judicatory shall record its actions, stating the reasons therefor. A copy shall be provided to the parties.

Sec. 14. The recorded decision and the disciplinary action shall be made available upon request to other assemblies within the Dominican Reformed Church and other appropriate ecclesiastical bodies. In addition, the judicatory, at its discretion, may distribute the recorded decision and disciplinary action to assemblies within the Dominican Reformed Church.

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

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

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

### **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 Dominican Reformed Church or other laws and regulations of the church.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sec. 2. The complaint and the reasons therefor shall be filed with the clerk of the higher judicatory within twenty days after the filing of notice of intent. In default of this

requirement, the complaint shall be considered to be dismissed and the clerk of the higher judicatory shall notify the parties involved.

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

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

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. It shall also hear the parties together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner with all parties present. If the complainant in person or by counsel fails to appear, the committee may declare the case to be defaulted.

Sec. 6. The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory by a date determined by the parent judicatory prior to the next stated meeting or a special meeting and shall furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. After receiving the report of the committee the judicatory may request to hear the original parties in the case with their counsel. The recommendation(s) of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended, or referred back to the committee. The judicatory may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the action of the lower assembly, or remand the matter to it with instructions.

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

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

Sec. 9. 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 Dominican Reformed Church or other laws and regulations of the church.<sup>31</sup>

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

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

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**Article 1. Nature of an Appeal**

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

Sec. 2. The grounds of appeal include: irregularity in the proceedings of the lower judicatory; refusal of reasonable indulgence to a party on trial; receiving improper, or declining to receive proper, evidence; rendering a decision before all the testimony is taken; bias or prejudice in the case; and manifest injustice in the judgment.

Sec. 3. Notice of intent to appeal suspends the judgment of the lower judicatory until the appeal is finally decided. But when the judgment which is appealed from results in suspension, deposition from office, or excommunication, the person against whom the judgment has been pronounced shall be required to refrain from the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and from the exercise of office until the appeal is finally decided, unless exception is made in the judgment of the lower judicatory.

Sec. 4. The General Synod shall be the final court of appeal for all cases originally heard by a board of elders.

**Article 2. Process for Appeals**

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

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

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

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

Sec. 5. If the case is in proper order, the committee shall then consider its merits. It shall consider the record of the case and such additional arguments as may have been submitted. It shall also hear the original parties, together with such counsel as may be requested by the parties. Counsel shall meet the qualifications set forth in Chapter 2, Part I, Article 5, Section 10. This hearing shall be conducted in a fair and impartial manner. Either party may elect not to appear in person or by counsel at the hearing.

Sec. 6. The committee shall report in writing its findings and recommendations to its parent judicatory by a date determined by the parent judicatory prior to the next stated meeting or a special meeting and shall furnish a copy of its report to each of the parties. After receiving the report of the committee, the judicatory may request to hear the original parties in the case with their counsel. The recommendation(s) of the committee may be adopted, rejected, amended, or referred back to the committee. The judicatory may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the decision of the lower judicatory or assembly, or remand the case to it with instructions.

Sec. 7. 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. 8. The judicatory shall record its decision, stating the reasons therefor.

Sec. 9. When an appeal is filed, the appellant shall have the responsibility to establish that the lower judicatory erred in its decision.

Sec. 10. The judicatory hearing the appeal shall give deference to the decision of the lower judicatory, particularly in the matter of credibility of witnesses, and shall uphold the decision of the lower judicatory if it is supported by substantial evidence in the record when the record is viewed as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

Sec. 11. No member or groups of the Dominican Reformed Church, 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. 12. No appeal can be taken from any decision of the General Synod.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE BYLAWS AND SPECIAL RULES OF ORDER

### Part I

#### *The Bylaws of the General Synod*

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#### **Article 1. Privileges and Duties of Delegates**

##### Sec. 1. Seating of Delegates

- a. A classis shall be required to be current in its tithies 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.

##### Sec. 2. Attendance

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

#### **Article 2. General Synod Executive Committee**

##### Sec. 1. Membership

The membership of the committee shall consist of the following:

- a. The president, vice-president, the immediate past president and the secretary of General Synod.
- b. One member recommended by each classis from among its regular classis.

##### Sec. 3. Term of Office

The term of office for the elected member shall be three 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 \_\_\_\_ of the year they are elected and be completed on \_\_\_\_.

#### Sec. 4. Officers

The president, vice president, and secretary of the General Synod shall be the president, vice president and secretary of the executive committee.

#### Sec. 5. Meetings

- a. The executive committee shall hold three stated meetings each year.
- b. The executive committee shall hold special meetings when necessary.

#### Sec. 6. Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the executive committee of the General Synod shall be:

- a. To serve as the Committee of Reference at meetings of the General Synod.
- b. To act as the agent of the General Synod of the Dominican Reformed Church 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. The General Synod executive committee shall implement and administer such programs.
- c. To prepare a budget to sustain the established priorities, ministry, and mission of the Dominican Reformed Church and propose an assessment to the General Synod.
- d. To administer the affairs of the Dominican Reformed Church 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 Dominican Reformed Church.
- f. To support, strengthen, and coordinate the work of the Dominican Reformed Church, thus seeking to increase the effectiveness of the mission and witness of the church.
- g. 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 3. 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 4. Corresponding Delegates**

Sec. 1. Members of the executive committee if not already delegates to the General Synod shall be corresponding delegates with voice and votes.

Sec. 2. The executive committee will invite Corresponding delegates from the Reformed Church in America who will have voice and vote.

## Sec. 3. Ecumenical Delegates

The General Synod executive committee may invite representatives from other Christian churches who shall be corresponding delegates with voice but not vote.

## **Article 5. 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 6. Amendments**

The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod may be amended at any stated meeting 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

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## **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. Presentation and Referral of New Business
- c. Report of the Executive Committee
- d. Report of the President
- e. Election of Officers
- f. 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.
- 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 officer, committee, or assembly.
- b. Information on the 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 IRD officers, committees, or assemblies 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 committee or assembly. 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 one month before synod opens.

## Sec. 6. Presentation of Reports

Reports to General Synod may be commented upon, but shall not be read. A member of a committee or assembly shall present the report to General Synod. All recommendations from the reports shall be received as motions.

## Sec. 7. Submission of Overtures

The General Synod may receive overtures from a classis. It shall not receive overtures which deal with matters under adjudication or which make either direct or implied charges against persons. Overtures from classes shall be submitted to the General Synod office or postmarked not later than two months prior to the start of the General Synod meeting.

## Sec. 8. Presentation and Referral of New Business

The General Synod shall provide an opportunity for presenting new business in the first session of synod. 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 or committees. 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 committee or assembly 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 committees and assemblies 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 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.

**1. Declaration for Licensed Candidates**

(This Declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the classis. The candidate shall then sign a book containing the declaration.)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in becoming a licensed candidate for the ministry in the Dominican Reformed Church 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 Dominican Reformed Church. 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 classis, 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 according to 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 \_\_\_\_\_, having presented to the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_ testimonials of literary and theological attainments from the professors of the theological seminary at \_\_\_\_\_, 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 Dominican Reformed Church; and that the classis 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 \_\_\_\_\_ 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 classis 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 classis 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 classis, in the \_\_\_\_\_, on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_, President

\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

### 3. Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

(This Declaration shall be made orally by the candidate in the presence of the classis at the time of ordination or installation. The newly ordained or installed minister of Word and Sacrament shall then sign a book containing the declaration.)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in becoming a minister of the Word of God in the Dominican Reformed Church, within the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_, 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 Dominican Reformed Church. 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 classis, 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 according to 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 \_\_\_\_\_ was admitted by the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_ to an examination in the various branches of theology, as prescribed in the Government of the Dominican Reformed Church, preparatory to ordination, and the classis, 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 the said \_\_\_\_\_ be ordained to the gospel ministry. In conformity with that resolution the classis set him/her apart solemnly, on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, to the work of the sacred ministry, according to the rites and forms of the Dominican Reformed Church, and received him/her into the ministerial fellowship. The said classis 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 classis 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 classis, in the \_\_\_\_\_, on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_, President  
\_\_\_\_\_, Clerk

#### 4. Call to a Minister of Word and Sacrament

To the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Whereas, the \_\_\_\_\_ Church of \_\_\_\_\_ is well satisfied with the piety, gifts, and ministerial qualifications of you, (N.N.), and has good hope that your labors as a minister of the gospel in this place will be attended with a blessing.

Therefore, we, (here insert the legal title of the church), hereby solemnly and in the fear of the Lord do call you, the said (N.N.), 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 Dominican Reformed Church, 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 \$\_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ 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 which refer to a parsonage or residence, or other emoluments). We also promise to pay the stipulated contributions to the Reformed Church retirement plan and the premiums for group life insurance, long-term disability insurance, and medical insurance for the minister as offered by the Board of Benefits Services, and further, to provide this same medical insurance for your family except where the immediate family\* has medical coverage through a spouse's employer-sponsored group plan as long as you

continue to be the minister of this church. 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 classis 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 this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

Attested by \_\_\_\_\_  
Supervisor of the call

*\*“Immediate family” is understood to mean those dependents eligible for family medical insurance according to the insurance plan document of the Board of Benefits Services.*

### **5. Application for the Dissolution of a Pastoral Relationship**

To the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, Classis of \_\_\_\_\_:

This certifies that the undersigned was present by request at a meeting of the consistory of the \_\_\_\_\_ Church of \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, and superintended the proceedings thereof. It was resolved at that meeting that an application be made to the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_ for a dissolution of the pastoral relationship between the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ and said church effective \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_. The Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ concurred in that application.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Minister of Classis  
dated: \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

### **6. Certificate for the Transfer of a Minister of Word and Sacrament**

To the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_:

This is to attest that the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_ is a member in good and regular standing of the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_, and is now requesting dismission to the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_, to whose Christian fellowship and care he/she is hereby affectionately commended. When received by the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_, the Rev. \_\_\_\_\_'s relation to this classis shall cease.

Last served as delegate to General Synod \_\_\_\_\_ (year)

\_\_\_\_\_, Stated Clerk  
Classis of \_\_\_\_\_  
(date) \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Certificate for the Transfer of a Church to Another Denomination**

The Classis of \_\_\_\_\_ of the Dominican Reformed Church hereby certifies that it has duly considered the petition of the \_\_\_\_\_ Church of \_\_\_\_\_ for leave to withdraw from the denomination and to affiliate with the \_\_\_\_\_; 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 Dominican Reformed Church.

Therefore, the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_ of the Dominican Reformed Church does hereby dismiss the aforementioned church from its jurisdiction, subject to the provisions of Part II, Article 7, Section 18 of the Government of the Dominican Reformed Church, and affectionately commends that church to the \_\_\_\_\_.

In witness whereof, this certificate has been duly signed by order of such classis this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Stated Clerk

**8. Charge**

**DOMINICAN REFORMED CHURCH**

NAME OF THE ACCUSER \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP \_\_\_\_\_

NAME OF THE ACCUSED \_\_\_\_\_

NATURE OF ALLEGED OFFENSE

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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TIME, PLACE, CIRCUMSTANCES OF ALLEGED OFFENSE

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Date

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Signature

**9. Citation to an Accused Person or Consistory**

DOMINICAN REFORMED CHURCH

IN THE MATTER OF THE  
CHARGES BY:

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THE ACCUSER,

AGAINST

CITATION TO AN  
ACCUSED PERSON\*

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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 \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock in the \_\_.m. of the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_

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President

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Clerk of the Consistory

of \_\_\_\_\_  
Church of \_\_\_\_\_

OR

of the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_

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

**10. Citation to a Witness**

DOMINICAN REFORMED CHURCH  
IN THE MATTER OF THE  
CHARGES BY:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

THE ACCUSER,

AGAINST

CITATION TO A  
WITNESS

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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 \_\_\_\_\_ o'clock in the \_\_.m. of the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_\_, at \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk of the Consistory

of \_\_\_\_\_  
Church of \_\_\_\_\_

OR

of the Classis of \_\_\_\_\_

**11. 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 Dominican Reformed Church; is (and at all times shall be) subject to and governed by the Constitution of the Dominican Reformed Church; 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 classis of which this [corporation/organization] is a member.