

# Part I

## *The Consistory*

### *Article 1. Definitions*

*Sec. 1.* A consistory is the governing body of a local church. Its members are the installed minister/s of that church serving under a call, 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.
- c. A collegiate church is two or more congregations served and governed by a single consistory, constituting one church organization.
- d. A multiple parish is a group of local churches sharing the services of one or more installed ministers.

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

*Sec. 3.* Ministers are those men and women who have been inducted into that office by ordination in accordance with the Word of God and the order established or recognized by the Reformed Church in America. They are equal in authority as ministers and as stewards of the mysteries of God. Ministers shall ordinarily be confessing members of only the Reformed Church in America, 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, professor, 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 Reformed Church in America.

*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 Reformed Church in America.

*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

## 1.I.2

ministry to which Christ calls the church, provided the consistory does not infringe upon the prerogatives of other consistories, classes, and synods.

*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 may call a minister of a Christian church that the General Synod has declared to be in full communion with the Reformed Church in America. The classis shall install the minister according to the office for installation in the Liturgy but shall not receive the minister into the classis. The minister shall be *ipso facto* a temporary member of the classis.

*Sec. 5.* A consistory may call one or more associate ministers. The form of the call to an associate minister shall be the same as that to the senior minister, except that the word "associate" shall be inserted before the words "pastor" or "minister," wherever they occur in the text of the call. The associate minister shall be a member of the consistory. (On the "assistant minister," see Part II, Article 7, Section 9.)

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

*Sec. 7.* A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Formulary #5) for all ministers serving the church full-time under call or contract through participation in the retirement and insurance programs of the Reformed Church in America, unless the minister is covered through the Canadian portion of the RCA plan or the plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held.

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

*Sec. 9.* A consistory or its minister may request the classis to terminate the minister's relationship to that church. (See Chapter 1, Part II, Article 12, Section 8.)

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

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

- a. The order of worship on the Lord's Day shall be in accordance with the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America, or with the principles set forth in the *Directory for Worship*, as the consistory may direct for the edification and profit of the congregation.
- b. The sacrament of baptism shall be administered, if possible, at a time and place of public worship. "The 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 hymns used in public worship shall be in harmony with the Standards of the Reformed Church in America.
- 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

## 1.1.2

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. Ordinarily, the preaching of the Word shall be performed by an ordained minister or a theological student appointed pursuant to the Government of the Reformed Church in America, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 7. In special circumstances, an elder commissioned by the classis as a preaching elder may preach. However, a consistory may authorize, in occasional or special circumstances, other persons to preach.

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

*Sec. 13.* The consistory shall have the care and supervision of the church's property and financial interests. They are the trustees of the church's property, unless the act of incorporation of the church, or the statutes of the state in which the church is incorporated, make other provision. The consistory shall not sell, transfer, lease, mortgage or otherwise alienate or encumber any real property of the church on which there stands a building designed for worship or religious instruction, or as a residence for the minister, unless the approval of the 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. 14.* The consistory shall be guided by the following requirements in its supervision of the election of elders and deacons to membership in the consistory:

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

- b. Notice of a congregational meeting for the election of elders and deacons shall be made in the usual place of worship on two Sundays preceding the date of such meeting. When an election has been omitted at its usual time, the consistory shall designate another time for that purpose, at an early date. They shall furnish notice of the meeting in the usual way (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.
  - (3) The method approved by the church's charter.
  - (4) The method approved by the church's bylaws, subject to approval by the classis.
- 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.

## 1.I.2

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

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

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

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

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

*Sec. 19.* The consistory shall make a statistical report at the meeting of classis immediately preceding the stated meetings of the regional and General Synods. The report shall comply with the requirements of the General Synod and shall be accompanied by such comment on the spiritual state of the church as the consistory may deem proper.

### ***Article 3. Officers of the Consistory***

*Sec. 1.* The consistory shall elect one of its ministers serving under call to be president of the consistory who shall preside at all of its meetings except where otherwise provided. It shall be the duty of the president to state and explain the business to be transacted, to enforce the rules of order, and, in general, to maintain the decorum and dignity belonging to the church of Jesus Christ.

*Sec. 2.* The consistory shall elect one of the elders to the office of vice-president. If there is more than one installed minister serving under a call the consistory may elect the associate minister/s to the office of vice-president in addition to the elder vice-president. The order of seniority of the several vice-presidents shall then be determined.

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

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

#### ***Article 4. Transaction of Business***

*Sec. 1.* The consistory shall be guided in its transaction of business by such rules of order as it shall adopt from time to time, and which are in accord with the Government of the Reformed Church in America. Elders and deacons have an equal voice.

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

*Sec. 3.* All consistory meetings shall 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 may permit a confessing member of a congregation or classis of the Reformed Church in America who is serving as a missionary outside of the United States or Canada to hold membership also in an indigenous church.
- g. It shall remove from the church roll the name of the following members: one who has transferred to another church; one who has united with another church without securing a certificate of transfer; one whose membership has been terminated by a procedure of discipline; one who has had a prolonged inactive status; a deceased member; and that of a licensed ministerial candidate upon becoming the installed minister of another church.
- h. 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:

- a. in need of special care regarding their spiritual condition and/or
- b. are not making faithful use of the means of grace, i.e., attending worship and participating in the sacraments and shall provide the means of extending Christian ministry to such persons.

### 1.I.5

*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 consistency of its ministry, including its collection and distribution of the benevolence contributions of the congregation.

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

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

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

- a. The following Plan of Union is adopted by the \_\_\_\_\_ Reformed Church of \_\_\_\_\_, effective as of the date when each of the congregations have approved the plan by a two-thirds majority of those present at a regularly called congregational meeting with such notice and quorum as is required by the constitution of each church, and when the classis (presbytery) of jurisdiction of each church has approved the particular union and this Plan of Union.
- b. The purpose of this union is to provide for the worship of Almighty God and instruction in the Christian religion by a united congregation which will share the property, real and personal, of the uniting churches and provide for the services of a minister or ministers for the united church.
- c. The united church shall be known as the Church of \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. The united church shall be subject to the constitution of each church involved as set forth in subsections r, s, u, and v.
- e. The consistory (session) shall submit its records annually, and whenever requested, to each assembly (judicatory) of jurisdiction.
- f. The membership of the united church shall consist of those who were members of the uniting churches, plus those received by the consistory (session) of the united church.
- g. The consistory (session) of the united church shall report an equal share of the total membership to each assembly (judicatory) and jurisdiction, and such membership shall be published in the *Acts and Proceedings (Minutes)* of the general assembly, with a note to the effect that the report is that of a union church, and with an indication of the total actual membership. A similar report of church school enrollment, baptisms, etc., and financial expenditures shall be made by the consistory (session) and noted by each general assembly in its minutes.
- h. Initially the officers of the united church, elders and deacons, shall be those officers in active service of the united churches, who will undertake to perform their ordination responsibilities under the constitution of each church, as indicated in subsections d above and r, s, u, and v below.

### 1.I.7

- i. At the first annual meeting subsequent to the effective date of the union, new classes of officers, to replace the officers noted in subsection h above, shall be elected by the united congregation according to the constitutional procedure in force as a consequence of subsection v below.
- j. The pastoral relations of the ministers of the uniting churches shall be dissolved automatically by the action of the classis (presbytery) of jurisdiction in approving this plan, but they may be eligible to be ministers (pastors or associate pastors) of the united church according to the will of the united congregation and subject to the approval of the classes (both the classis and the presbytery).
- k. The minister/s of the united church shall be full and responsible members of each assembly (judicatory) of immediate jurisdiction and shall be subject to discipline as provided below in subsection t.
- l. The united church shall cause a corporation to be formed under the appropriate laws of the state where permissible. The corporation shall include in its articles or charter the substance of subsections b, c, and d above.
- m. All property of the uniting churches, real and personal, shall be transferred to the corporation formed in subsection l above. The new corporation shall be the legal successor of the corporations, if any, of the uniting churches, and it shall be bound to administer any trust property or moneys received in accordance with the provisions of the original establishment of the trust. All liabilities of the uniting churches shall be liabilities of the united church. In any state where a church corporation is forbidden, the purposes of this subsection shall be achieved in harmony with the law of that state.
- n. Trustees of the corporation (or the unincorporated body) shall be elected in harmony with civil law according to the constitutional provisions outlined in subsection d above, as interpreted by subsection v below.
- o. While recognizing the basic right of any giver to designate the cause or causes to which the gift shall go, the consistory (session) of the united church shall annually propose to the congregation a general mission or benevolence program which shall be divided equitably among the officially approved causes of each denomination. The proportions shall

be as the consistory (session) shall decide in response to the request of the higher assemblies (judicatories).

- p. Per capita apportionments or assessments shall be paid to each classis (presbytery) of jurisdiction on the basis of the total communicant membership of the union church, equally divided among the denominations involved.
- q. All members of the united church shall be under the discipline of the board of elders (session) according to rules agreed upon in harmony with the constitution of each denomination where they coincide, and in harmony with the mandatory provisions of the constitution of one denomination where the others are permissive, and at the choice of the board of elders (session) where they may be contradictory.
- r. Complaints against the actions of the consistory (or its equivalent) may be taken under constitutional provisions of only one denomination, according to the choice of the complainant, and once being complained to one judicatory, no other denomination shall accept jurisdiction in the same matter.
- s. Appeals from the judicial actions of the board of elders (or its equivalent) shall be made to one judicatory only (classis or its equivalent) at the choice of the member(s) filing the appeal; and all subsequent appeals shall be in the courts of the denomination where the original appeal was filed, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on the board of elders (or its equivalent) and on the members.
- t. The minister/s shall be subject to the discipline of the classes (the presbytery and the classis) provided that when either shall begin an action, it shall invite a committee from the others to join the commissioner, prosecutor, or prosecuting committee in formulating and pressing the charges. In the event of appeal the case shall be finally decided by the highest court to which the appeal is taken in the church which commenced the action, and that decision shall be equally binding on the classes (both presbytery and the classis).
- u. RCA ministers serving union churches shall participate in the RCA retirement and insurance plans as required by the *Book of Church Order*.

- v. Wherever the constitutions of the denominations differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions (except as provided in subsection q above), the consistory (session) of the united church shall petition the assemblies (judicatories) of immediate jurisdiction to overture their respective highest courts to resolve the conflict either by authoritative interpretations or by constitutional amendment.
- w. A union church may be dissolved by a two-thirds vote of two congregational meetings, held not less than one year and not more than two years apart, subject to the concurrence of the classes (presbyteries) involved. In case of dissolution of a union church, all property of the united church, real and personal, shall be divided equally between the classes (the presbytery and the classis) of jurisdiction.

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

### ***Article 8. Federated Churches***

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

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

- a. The continued existence of the Reformed church as a religious corporation.
- b. The designation of a body within the federated church to act as trustees of the Reformed religious corporation.
- c. The agreement to a common doctrine, liturgy, and government that honors the traditions of the Reformed Church in America.

- d. The agreement that when the constitutions of the churches involved differ, the mandatory provisions of one shall apply in all cases when the others are permissive. Wherever there are conflicting mandatory provisions, the governing body of the federated church shall petition the assemblies (judicatories) of immediate jurisdiction to overture their respective highest courts to resolve the conflict.
- e. The freedom of the federated church to call its ministers from any communion comprising the federation that it sees fit.
- f. The agreement that each minister shall be subject to the discipline of the communion to which he or she is accountable and that he or she agrees to honor the confessions, liturgy, government, and discipline of the other communions.
- g. The designation of which body shall exercise discipline and shall have authority over the administration of the sacraments.

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

*Sec. 4.* Appeals from the judicial actions of the board of elders (or its equivalent) shall be made to only one judicatory at the choice of the member(s) filing the appeal; and all subsequent appeals shall be in the courts of the denomination where the original appeal was filed, and decisions so finally made shall be binding on all parties, including the board of elders (or its equivalent), and on members.

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