

Part IV

The General Synod

Article 1. General Synod Defined

The General Synod is the highest assembly and judicatory of the Reformed Church in America. It consists of two minister delegates and two elder delegates from each of the classes having four thousand or fewer confessing members on the roll of its churches, and one minister delegate and one elder delegate for each two thousand confessing members, or fraction thereof, from each of the classes having more than four thousand confessing members on the roll of its churches as computed in accordance with the Bylaws of the General Synod; one elder or minister delegate from each of the regional synods; two General Synod professor of theology delegates from each of the theological seminaries of the Reformed Church; a number of furloughing missionary and chaplain delegates; and corresponding delegates provided for in the Bylaws of the General Synod. Voting rights shall be limited to elder delegates and those minister delegates who are actively serving in ministries under the jurisdiction or with the approval of an assembly. The General Synod is a permanent, continuing body which functions between stated sessions through the General Synod Council, commissions, and agencies.

Article 2. Responsibilities of the General Synod

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

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

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

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

Sec. 5. The General Synod shall maintain a friendly correspondence and

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cooperative relationship with the highest judicatories or assemblies of other Christian denominations and with interdenominational agencies in all matters pertaining to the extension of the Kingdom of God.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 assembly as soon as possible. Upon notification by the stated clerk, the alternate delegate shall assume the rights and responsibilities of the appointment.

Sec. 4. The delegates from the theological seminaries shall be elected by the General Synod Professors of Theology in each school from their own number.

Sec. 5. The furloughing missionary with at least five years of service in the field shall be eligible for appointment to the General Synod from the classis of membership once during each furlough and shall not be counted as one of the regular delegates of that classis.

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

Sec. 7. The General Synod shall pay travel expenses within Canada and the United States (exclusive of Alaska and Hawaii) to and from the synod's place of meeting.

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

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

Sec. 3. The presence of a majority of the minister delegates and a majority of the elder delegates is required to constitute a quorum at any meeting of the General Synod.

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

Article 5. Officers of the General Synod

Sec. 1. A president shall be elected from among the delegates to preside at the next session of the General Synod, and to undertake such other duties as may be assigned by the synod. It shall be the duty of the president to state and explain the business to be transacted, to enforce the rules of order, and, in general, to maintain the decorum and dignity belonging to the church of Jesus Christ. It shall also be the duty of the president to present a report on the state of religion in the classes, and to make proposals for future action. The president shall be a member of the General Synod until the close of the next annual session of synod.

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

Sec. 3. The General Synod shall have a general secretary whose duty shall be to present at each General Synod meeting a report articulating a vision for the church, including recommendations for the future; to keep faithful record of all the proceedings of the body; and to furnish official notices in writing to all persons directly affected by judicial decisions of the assembly. The general secretary shall also be responsible for forwarding to the denominational

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

Article 6. Transaction of Business

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

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

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

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

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

Sec. 5. The governing boards of all institutions of higher learning in the United States which are officially related to the Reformed Church in America shall at all times include at least three members who are designated by the General Synod.

Article 8. The Office of General Synod Professor of Theology

Sec. 1. The office of professor of theology is to teach one or more branches of theology in a theological seminary; to administer the academic functions of a seminary, subject to the rules established by the General Synod and supervised through the board of trustees of an RCA seminary; and to exercise general supervision over the students.

Sec. 2. The professor of theology shall be a minister in good standing, sound in the faith, possessed of ability to teach, have the confidence of the churches, and shall have made recognized contributions to the church.

Sec. 3. When a Reformed Church minister has completed three years as a full-time associate or full professor at one of the seminaries of the Reformed Church, the board of trustees of an RCA seminary may nominate that professor to the General Synod as candidate for the office of professor of theology. A professor of theology shall be elected by the General Synod by a majority vote of the members present.

Sec. 4. When an election of a professor of theology has been effected, the president of the General Synod shall authorize a service of installation for the newly elected professor. At the installation and before signing the *Form of the Declaration for Professors of Theology*, the professor-elect shall present a letter of dismission to the General Synod from the classis of membership. Before entering upon the duties of the office, the professor of theology shall subscribe to the *Form of the Declaration for Professors of Theology* (see Appendix, No. 7).

Sec. 5. A professor of theology shall be amenable in matters of doctrine solely to the General Synod, but the professor will be subject to the same policies and procedures of employment as the other professors of the seminaries established by the seminary boards, except that a professor of theology shall have the right of appeal to the General Synod against dismissal from a position at one of the seminaries.

Sec. 6. The General Synod shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled professor and the professor's immediate family. Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the synod deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the synod annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The synod shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Formulary #5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its full-time professors of theology.

Sec. 7. A professor of theology shall not be the installed pastor or minister under contract of any congregation, but may preach and administer or assist in administering the sacraments in any church as a minister upon request of the pastor or consistory of that church.

Sec. 8. A professor of theology shall continue in office until death, resignation, dismissal from the seminary, declaration by the General Synod as professor emeritus, or removal from office by the General Synod.

Sec. 9. When a professor of theology resigns the office elected to by the General Synod, or is no longer in full-time service at a Reformed Church seminary, the professor shall receive a certificate of dismissal from the General Synod to a classis or other ecclesiastical body, unless declared a professor emeritus.

Sec. 10. Upon reaching the age of seventy years, a professor of theology shall elect to be declared professor emeritus, or to be dismissed to a classis or other ecclesiastical body.

Sec. 11. The professor of theology may be retired from office by the General Synod because of permanent disability.

Sec. 12. Removal from office shall occur if after due process and trial the professor is found to be unsound in faith or is guilty of such misconduct as is deemed a violation of the obligations entered into at the time of installation.