

**2009
PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE
CONSTITUTION OF THE RCA**

The 2009 General Synod adopted the following amendments to the Constitution of the Reformed Church in America and recommended them to the classes for their approval in accordance with the Rules and Amendments of the Government of the Reformed Church in America and the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures (*BCO*, 2008 edition, p. 71). A brief explanatory comment (not in bold) precedes each proposed *BCO* amendment; it is not part of the proposed change to the Constitution and is not being voted on by the classes. For further background information about the proposed amendments, refer to the 2009 *Minutes of the General Synod*, which are referenced by page number. You may also access the reports of the Commissions on Church Order and Christian Unity by visiting the RCA website, www.rca.org, and searching for “General Synod.”

The amendments in the text below are indicated with proposed deletions stricken out and additions underlined.

1. Additional General Synod Delegates from Underrepresented Groups (*MGS 2009*, R-14, p. 90)

In order for the voices of General Synod to better reflect the makeup of the Reformed Church in America, the proposed amendment adds additional delegates from underrepresented groups of people. If the change is approved, classes will be given periodic opportunity to send a minister or elder delegate from an underrepresented group in addition to its current delegates.

***BCO*, Chapter 1, Part IV, Article 1, and Article 3, Section 7, and renumbering subsequent sections**, p. 63 and p. 65

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; three additional elder or minister delegates who are women, three additional elder or minister delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and three additional elder or minister delegates who are thirty years of age or younger; 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 3. *Delegates*

Sec. 7. The three additional delegates who are women, three additional delegates who are racial/ethnic minorities, and three additional delegates who are thirty years of age or younger shall be eligible for appointment as delegates to the General Synod from the classis of membership. A delegate shall be eligible once during each succeeding five year period as a representative of any of these categories. After a delegate from any of these categories has been appointed by a classis, that classis shall not have a delegate from that same category until such time as all other classes have had the opportunity to appoint a delegate in that category.

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.

2. Adding the Belhar Confession as a Doctrinal Standard (MGS 2009, R-55, p. 247)

The Reformed Church in America has studied the Belhar Confession for many years. In the year 2000, the General Synod voted that the RCA study the Belhar Confession for a decade. In the year 2001, the General Synod extended the idea of study to include the implications of the endorsement of the Belhar Confession for the life and ministry of RCA. In the year 2007, the General Synod voted to adopt the Belhar provisionally for two years during which RCA members and churches would use it in worship, discipleship, and confession. The 2009 General Synod voted to adopt the Belhar Confession as an additional doctrinal standard of the Reformed Church in America. The doctrinal standards are listed in the Preamble to the *Book of Church Order*. The proposed amendment is the final step of the adoption process by listing the Belhar Confession as the fourth standard.

BCO, Preamble, p. 1

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

3. Recourse for the Decision of an Investigative Committee (MGS 2009, R-58, p. 290)

The proposed amendment clarifies what recourse is available (or not available) when a charge that is being considered by the committee appointed by the classis for that purpose (the investigative committee) dismisses the charge. Since such dismissal is not a judgment of a

judicatory, it is not open to appeal. While the dismissal is the final resolution of that charge, a new charge may be filed, or a complaint against the actions of the investigative committee may be filed if one of the grounds of a complaint is alleged.

BCO, Chapter 2, Part I, Article 4, Section 6, p. 78

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.~~

4. Supersession of a Consistory—Additional Condition: Financial Irregularities (MGS 2009, R-59, p. 291-292)

Classes must determine that at least one of the conditions that are listed in *BCO* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 12 exist before moving to supersede a consistory. The proposed amendment adds financial irregularities or improprieties as one possible reason to allow supersession—a reason not now available to a classis.

BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 12, pp. 35-36

Sec. 12. 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. Financial irregularities or improprieties, including, but not limited to, the improper use of church funds.
- e. f. Neglect of the physical condition of the church properties.
- f. g. Insufficiency of confessing membership to fulfill the purposes and responsibilities of an organized church.
- g. h. Long-term or rapid decline in participation or membership.
- h. i. Inability to provide adequate ministerial services.

5. Supersession of a Consistory at the Request of Consistory (*MGS 2009*, R-60, p. 292)

A time may come in the life of a church where both the consistory and the classis realize that it is the end of that church's ministry. Undoubtedly requests from consistories to be superseded now occur. The proposed change clarifies that this is a valid condition for a classis to take the supersession action.

***BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 12**, pp. 35-36

***Sec. 12.* 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.**
- i. The consistory requests supersession.**

6. Clarification of the Process for Supersession of a Consistory (*MGS 2009*, R-61, p. 293-294)

Superseding a consistory needs to be done carefully so that the action taken is what is best for God's kingdom. The current sections of the *BCO* dealing with this process can be confusing and ambiguous. The goal of the amendment is to clarify for a classis the rules for the supersession of a consistory. No substantive changes of the intent of the *BCO* sections are represented in what is proposed.

***BCO*, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7**, pp. 36-37

***Sec. 13.* Classis shall be directed by the following rules when superseding a consistory:**

- a.** Before superseding a consistory, the classis shall ~~state~~ notify the church of its intention and summon the ~~consistory of that church~~ governing body 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. The notice shall include the following:
- (1)** The basis upon which the classis is seeking supersession.
 - (2)** The time, date, and location of the classis meeting where supersession shall be considered.
 - (3)** A statement that the consistory must appear at the meeting identified in Section 13(a)(2) and show cause why it should not be dissolved.
- b.** If the basis for supersession is the request of the consistory, the consistory need not show cause why it should not be dissolved and may, instead, advise the classis of its approval of this action.
- c.** 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.
- d.** 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. These persons shall serve the church in the same capacity as a consistory until such time as the life of the church has reached an end or a consistory for the church is reconstituted (Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7, Section 15).
- e.** ~~All actions~~ The final action of the classis ~~under this section to dissolve a consistory~~ shall require a two-thirds vote. of The classis shall have 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. 14. 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 state in which that church is located, to:

- a. Terminate whatever authority the consistory or any other body has as trustees of the church property.
- b. Take the church under its direction by appointing such trustees as are required for the protection, preservation, management, and ownership of the property during such time as the classis shall determine.

All actions of the classis under this section shall require a two-thirds vote, ~~of the members~~ The classis shall have 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. 15. 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). All actions of the classis under this section shall require a two-thirds vote. The classis shall have 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.

7. Receiving Ministers from Other Denominations (*MGS 2009*, R-62, p. 296-298)

The intent of the proposed amendment is to strengthen and clarify the rules that govern how a classis receives a minister from another denomination, while still allowing the classes to utilize good judgment in the specifics of the evidence of a minister's credentials. It clarifies that ministers from other denominations must have completed the same standards of preparation as those required in the RCA. It also clarifies that in all cases classes need to have proper evidence of the credentials of ministers from other denominations along with giving the classes flexibility to accept the equivalent of the specifics required.

BCO, Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, pp. 48-49

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 consider only an applicant who has satisfied educational requirements that are equivalent ~~determine whether the applicant's educational qualifications are equal~~ to those required in the Reformed Church in America, 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 Reformed Church in America; understanding of and adherence to the Standards of the Reformed Church in America; and loyalty to its agencies.

Sec. 4. a. ~~When an ordained minister of another denomination wishes to be considered for a call from a congregation in the RCA~~ apply for admission to the classis, that minister shall furnish the ~~stated clerk of~~ classis with the following or the equivalent:

- ~~1.~~ a. a written statement from the body holding the minister's credentials attesting that the minister is an ordained minister in good and regular standing;
- ~~2.~~ b. a completed Minister's Profile form;
- ~~3.~~ c. copies of academic degrees;
- ~~4.~~ d. a seminary transcript;
- ~~5.~~ e. names, addresses, and telephone numbers of five persons who are qualified to

- comment on the applicant's ministry;
- 6. f.** a statement from the applicant which attests to knowledge of Reformed Church history, readiness to adhere to the Standards of the RCA, and a basic knowledge of and readiness to support Reformed Church agencies and institutions.

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

- ~~b.~~ **a.** Prior to becoming a serious candidate for a call from a congregation in the Reformed Church in America, an ordained minister who is affiliated with another denomination shall meet with the appropriate committee of a Reformed Church classis, which shall determine whether, in its judgment, the minister is able to meet the requirements set forth in the *Book of Church Order*, Part II, Article 11, Sections 1, 2, ~~and 3,~~ and 4 above. The committee's judgment, whether positive or negative, shall be sent by the stated clerk to the Office of Ministry Services for attachment to the applicant's Minister's Profile form and such distribution as may be appropriate.
- ~~e.~~ **b.** If the committee's judgment is negative, the classis may appoint one or more of its ministers to assist the applicant in preparation for a second meeting with the classis committee, which shall take place not less than six months after the initial meeting. The committee may also require additional formal study prior to a second meeting.
- ~~d.~~ **c.** When an ordained minister who is affiliated with another denomination has met with a classis committee in order to determine whether the minister is qualified to be considered for a call to a Reformed church, and the committee is not satisfied with the minister's qualifications, any subsequent meetings for the same purpose shall take place within the same classis, unless the classis specifically requests another classis to act on its behalf.
- ~~e.~~ **d.** When a classis is requested to approve a call to a minister who is affiliated with another denomination, prior to its examination of the applicant it shall obtain full information from the chairperson of the committee which reviewed the applicant's qualifications, as outlined in ~~b, e, and d~~ a, b, and c above.

[The current Section 5 becomes Section 6.]