Getting Started
The Book of Church Order (BCO) comes in an orange, three-ring binder so that the pages inside can be replaced when amendments are approved. Start by reading the Preamble; it defines basic terms and principles of church order that provide an important foundation for understanding the rest of the book. Then, if you are only interested in issues relating to the local church, read Chapter 1, Part I, which is titled, “The Consistory.”

Contents
The BCO is divided into three chapters, followed by an appendix. Chapter 1 contains the Government, Chapter 2 contains the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, and Chapter 3 contains the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod. Chapter 1 is divided further by the assemblies of the church: Part I deals with the consistory; Part II, the classis; Part III, the regional synod; and Part IV, the General Synod. If you are looking for a particular subject, you can scan the table of contents at the beginning or check the index at the end of the book. You can also download a copy of the BCO from the RCA website (www.rca.org) and search for the word or phrase that interests you. It is wise to read every statement in its context, which may mean reading the entire part. If you want to know more about disciplinary procedures, the explanatory notes following Chapter 2 are helpful.

Interpretation
If you are still wondering how to interpret a provision of the BCO after reading through an entire part, you can start by contacting your pastor or the stated clerk of your classis. If they cannot answer your question, they will probably direct you to someone who can. The classis clerks have an informal network of people who can offer help.
If you have access to the *Minutes of General Synod (MGS)*, you can use the references to the *MGS* in the *BCO* to discover the background of recent amendments. You may also purchase *Constitutional Theology*, a commentary on the *BCO* by Allan Janssen, from Faith Alive Christian Resources: (800) 333-8300; sales@faithaliveresources.org; www.faithaliveresources.org.

If you are still uncertain, you may request an advisory opinion from the Commission on Church Order, which has the responsibility of providing responses to requests for interpretation of the *BCO*. You can contact the commission through the RCA office in New York City. You do not need to submit an overture to receive a response; a letter is all that is necessary.

**Freedom and Flexibility**

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

This guide was approved for use by the Commission on Church Order in February 2002.