

**Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder & Deacon
September 18, 2015**

Church Order Changes:

Section #1 – The Offices of the Church

Article 1

a. The Christian Reformed Church, confessing its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of his church, and desiring to honor the apostolic injunction that officebearers are “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph. 4:12), and to do so “in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40), regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities in the following articles.

Article 4

- a. In calling and electing to an office, the council shall ordinarily present to the congregation a nomination of at least twice the number to be elected. When the council submits a nomination which totals less than twice the number to be elected, it shall give reasons for doing so.
- b. Prior to making nominations the council may give the congregation an opportunity to direct attention to suitably gifted persons.

Article 11

The calling of a minister of the Word is to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and equip the members so that the church of Jesus Christ may be built up.

Article 12

a. A minister of the Word serving as pastor of a congregation shall preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship services, catechize the youth, and train members for Christian service. The minister, with other officebearers, shall supervise the congregation and fellow officebearers, exercise admonition and discipline, see to it that everything is done decently and in order, exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism and diaconal outreach.

Article 25

- a. The elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designated by the council. The length of term should be appropriate for continuity and succession of ministry leadership. Retiring officebearers shall be succeeded by others unless the circumstances and the profit of the church make immediate eligibility for reelection advisable. Elders and deacons who are thus reelected shall be reinstalled.
- b. The elders, with the minister(s), shall oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow officebearers, shall provide counsel and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, shall participate in and promote evangelism, and shall defend the faith. As shepherds of the church, they shall encourage and support the members in their Christian life. The elders also shall nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation in the Lord’s Supper through encouragement, instruction, and accountability.
- c. The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people, especially to those who belong to the community of believers. Deacons shall lead the members in ways that inspire faithful stewardship of their time, talents, and resources and so give life in this world the shape of God’s kingdom. Thus deacons shall create and encourage participation in structures and ministries of mercy, justice, and reconciliation, both locally and globally. All of this shall be done with words of biblical encouragement and testimony, which assure the unity of word and deed.

Section #2 – The Assemblies of the Church

Article 35

- a. In every church there shall be a council composed of the minister(s), the elders, and the deacons. Those tasks which belong to the common administration of the church, such as [promoting its mission](#), calling a pastor, approving nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern, are the responsibility of the council.
- b. In every church there shall be a consistory composed of the elders and the minister(s) of the Word. Those tasks which belong distinctively to the office of elder are the responsibility of the consistory. The consistory shall [give an account of its work to the council](#).

Section #3 – The Task and Activities of the Church

Article 62

Opportunity shall be given regularly, as part of worship, to offer gifts, both financial and otherwise, to develop and sustain ministries of the congregation, [locally within its own community](#), the shared ministries of the denomination globally, and other causes that the church supports.

Article 64

- a. Each church shall minister to its adult members so as to increase their knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to nurture a mature faith in Christ, to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers, and [to equip them to fulfill their calling in the church and in the world](#).

Section #3 - D. Ministries of the Church

Article 73

In joyful obedience to the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, the [church is called to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his kingdom through word and deed](#).

Article 74

- a. Each church shall [proclaim](#) the gospel to its community. [The local church is to announce and demonstrate, through word and deed](#), that God's reign has come; to live as an exhibit of God's healing and reconciling grace; and to extend to all the invitation to experience new life in Christ through repentance and faith.
- b. [The council shall be responsible to develop a vision and provide training and leadership to equip the church to fulfill its unique evangelistic and diaconal calling](#). Churches are encouraged to work with neighboring churches, appropriate community resources, classical and denominational resources, and other gifts the Lord has provided to help accomplish their tasks.
- c. Each council shall encourage the members of the congregation to support denominational and classical ministries by their interest, prayers, and gifts.
- d. [Each church shall ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates](#).

Article 75

- a. [The classes shall implement a ministry plan that advances evangelistic and diaconal witness to Christ and his kingdom in its specific region and, when necessary, assist those churches needing support to fulfill their mission](#).
- b. [Each classis shall ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates](#).

Article 76

- a. Synod shall encourage and assist congregations and classes [in their work of word and deed witness to Christ and his kingdom](#). Synod shall also appoint denominational ministries that engage churches and classes in ministries that are local, national, binational, and global.
- b. Synod shall ensure that [deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates](#).

Synod 2015

V11: Proposed Changes to the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons

That synod adopt the following revision to the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons (changes noted in **boldface text**): **Note that final changes to the Form will not happen until Synod 2016.**

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

Today we celebrate God's gift of faithful leadership for his people. We joyfully thank him for elders and deacons who have served well and completed their terms of office. And we praise him for providing their successors.

In the officebearers of the church we see the love of Christ for his people. As the Lord of the church he appoints leaders **to govern in his name and promote the spiritual well-being of his people. By his Spirit he equips these leaders** so that believers may grow in faith, develop disciplined Christian living, serve others in selfless love, and share with all the good news of salvation. **The apostle Paul stated this most clearly when he wrote to the church in Ephesus, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). And Jesus Christ** taught us the spirit of true leadership when he said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28).

Elders serve **by exercising oversight of the church in Christ's name. In taking his leave from the elders in Ephesus, Paul counseled them: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Also in Acts we see the apostles and elders of the church providing leadership. Elders** must provide true preaching **of the Word, instruction for faith formation for both youth and adults,** regular celebration of the sacraments, and faithful counsel and discipline while keeping in confidence those matters entrusted to them. And they must promote fellowship and hospitality among believers, ensure good order in the church, and stimulate witness to all people.

Deacons serve **by leading and equipping the church to serve its members and the world in a rich diversity of ministries, awakening compassion, demonstrating mercy, seeking justice, and collaborating with God's Spirit for the transformation of persons and communities. In imitation of Christ's mercy, deacons summon the church to help relieve victims of injustice, equip the church for ministries of reconciliation and peacemaking, seek opportunities for advocacy, and call God's people to faithful stewardship of the gifts of creation.** By this they show that Christians live by the Spirit of the kingdom, fervently desiring to give life the shape of things to come. Deacons are therefore **to identify and develop gifts in both the church and community,** assess needs, promote **generous stewardship, and offer wise and respectful care for the poor. By adding to all this words of encouragement and hope, deacons demonstrate in word and deed the care of the Lord himself.**

The deacons and elders, together with the ministers, are responsible for the general administration of the church. These tasks of elders and deacons call for believers who are Christlike, who are mature in the faith, and who exercise their offices with prayer, patience, and humility.

Now we intend to ordain elders and deacons and to install them for terms of service {Introduction to the nominees and question time...}

Charge to the Elders

I charge you, elders, **as shepherds of the flock,** to **"hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that [you] can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it" (Titus 1:9).** Be a friend and Christlike example to children. Give clear and cheerful guidance to young people. By word and example, bear up God's people in their pain and weakness, and celebrate their joys with them. Hold in trust all sensitive matters

confided to you. Encourage the aged to persevere in God's promises. Be wise counselors who support and strengthen the pastor. Be compassionate, yet firm and consistent in rebuke and discipline. Know the Scriptures, which are "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Pray continually for the church. Remember at all times that if you would truly give spiritual leadership in the household of faith, you must be completely mastered by your Lord (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

Charge to the Deacons

I charge you, deacons, to inspire faithful **ministries of service to one another, to the larger community, and to the world.** Remind us that **the Lord requires us "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God" (Mic. 6:8).** Prompt us to seize new opportunities to **love God, our neighbors, and the creation with acts of generous sharing, joyful hospitality, thoughtful care for the poor, and wise stewardship of all of God's gifts.** **Weigh our opportunities for giving and service, that we might use the church's resources discerningly. Offer wise care to victims of injustice, and teach us holistic responses that respect their dignity and mend the broken relationships and exploitative structures and systems that contribute to poverty. With respectful compassion for the needy and awareness of the often hidden needs of the wealthy, teach us to minister to rich and poor alike, both within and outside the church. Encourage all with words that bring hope to their hearts and with deeds that bring joy into their lives. Show us by your example how to be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and to be sensitive counselors to the victims of such evils. Let your lives be above reproach, and live as examples of Christ Jesus, looking to the interests of others. And in all your ministries help us anticipate and participate in the renewal of all things when God's kingdom comes.**

The Charge to the Deacons (Original Deacon's Mandate)

I charge you, deacons, **to inspire faithful stewardship in this congregation.** Remind us that "from everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded (Luke 12:48b). **Teach us to be merciful. Prompt us to seize new opportunities** to worship God with offerings of wealth, time and ability. **Help us realize** that benevolence is a quality of **our** life in Christ and not merely a matter of financial assistance. Therefore, **minister** to *rich* and *poor alike*, both *within* and *outside* the church. **Weigh the needs of causes and use the church's resources discerningly. Be compassionate to the needy. Encourage them** with words that create hope in their hearts **and with deeds** that bring joy into *their* lives. **Be prophetic critics** of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and **be sensitive counselors to the victims** of such evils. **Let your lives be above reproach; live as examples of Christ Jesus; look to the interests of others.**