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**I. Background of task force**

The Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon was appointed by Synod 2013 to continue and expand on the work of the Diakonia Remixed: Office of Deacon Task Force. We submit the following progress report to Synod 2014, anticipating that it will help to provide feedback for our work before our task force submits final recommendations to Synod 2015.

The Diakonia Remixed: Office of Deacon Task Force report to Synod 2013 can be found in the *Agenda for Synod 2013*, pp. 263-98 ([www.crcna.org/SynodResources](http://www.crcna.org/SynodResources)). Synod 2013's response to the report can be found in the *Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 620-26 (also at [www.crcna.org/SynodResources](http://www.crcna.org/SynodResources)).

**II. Mandate**

The structure of this preliminary report is organized in response to the following mandate given to the task force by Synod 2013:

- 3. That synod appoint a revised task force to address the following areas for the consideration and approval of synod prior to the adoption of the proposed changes to Articles 40 and 45:
  - a. Questions
    - 1) Church Order Article 35 assigns "tasks which belong to the common administration of the church" to the council (pastors, elders, and deacons). What biblical and confessional basis exists for those tasks, which on the congregational level belong distinctively to the office of elder and to the office of deacon (Church Order Art. 35), to be assigned collectively to elder and deacon delegates on the classical and synodical levels?
    - 2) What is the unity that the offices share, and how are the "dignity and honor" of the offices distinguished from how they differ in "mandate and task" (Church Order Art. 2)? What does it mean to have parity of office?
    - 3) How do the distinctiveness of each office, the unique giftedness, the parity of offices, and yet the differences in "mandate and task" influence and shape the agendas of major assemblies that would have both elders and deacons seated?
    - 4) In what ways can the agendas of the major assemblies be shaped for meaningful inclusion and participation by deacons, without tying the hands of the individual classes and their local expression (minimal regulation for maximum engagement)?

- 5) What changes, highlights, or broadening of the mandate of synod would help make the seating of all officebearers at synod meaningful and beneficial?
- b. Development of a plan for resourcing and revitalizing both elders and deacons, including plans for its implementation.
- c. Recommendations for appropriate changes to the Church Order, including review of the proposed changes within the report of the 2013 Office of Deacon Task Force, considering further changes relating to the other offices, and clarifying a missional vision, all with a view to integrating such recommended changes.

*Grounds:*

- a. Persistent concerns have been raised about perceived blurring of the lines distinguishing the offices while at the same time highlighting the need for acknowledging the unique giftedness of each office.
  - b. There is a perceived difference in how the report of the Office of Deacon Task Force addresses parity of office and how Church Order Article 2 addresses it.
  - c. Addressing these questions and concerns will help the church integrate the seating of deacons with the intended agenda of the major assembly.
  - d. A plan for resourcing and revitalizing the offices will help ensure that we do not end up simply making changes in the composition of current structures, but make these changes for the purpose of revitalized offices.
  - e. The current Office of Deacon Task Force, as per their mandate, addressed only one of the offices. There is value in doing the same for all the offices, as may be appropriate, so that it is done in a complete and integrated manner rather than piecemeal.
4. That synod, in appointing a new task force, include two members of the current Office of Deacon Task Force, as well as others representing the offices and missional interests of the CRCNA, to address the matters identified in Recommendation 3 above. They will report their findings and recommendations to Synod 2015 and give a progress report of their work to Synod 2014.

*Grounds:*

- a. Having two members of the current task force will give continuity to the work they have done.
  - b. Adding those with expertise in the other offices, as well as those with expertise in the area of mission, will allow for a fuller and more integrated inclusion of the diaconal office at major assemblies and will help move the “mission” of assemblies in more missional directions. . . .
8. That synod refer the balance of the Office of Deacon Task Force Report, Recommendation G, to the new task force.

*(Acts of Synod 2013, pp. 624-26)*

### III. Parity of office

The mandate given to this task force includes consideration of the five questions listed above (under 3, a in the quote from *Acts of Synod 2013*). Questions 1 through 4 seem to us to be closely related to one another. They are all concerned with parity of office—equal in dignity and honor but with distinctive mandates. This section provides the task force’s initial response to these issues—the biblical and confessional basis for the tasks of elders and deacons, the meaning of parity, and the distinctive roles at the broader assemblies.

"The church has existed from the beginning of the world," says the Belgic Confession, and throughout its history it has taken on various forms. It even, for a time, after all of its Old Covenant theocratic and monarchical forms, appeared very small, "as though it were snuffed out" (Art. 27). But the gospels then proclaim its New Testament re-formation as an act of abundant grace whereby one who denied being Jesus' disciple was declared to be the "rock" upon which the church would now be built (Matt. 16:18; John 21:15-17). The Belgic Confession then goes on to obligate all members of this church communally to "bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ" and "serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given" (Art. 28). Service and edification, in other words, lie at the heart of all that the church is called by Christ to do in its mission to the world (Matt. 20:25-28; Luke 22:27; John 13:14; 2 Cor. 4:5). Accordingly, the church's leaders are mandated continually to "equip his people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12). Equipping the saints—that will be their particular service to the believers as they, all together, "grow in the grace and knowledge" of their Lord (2 Pet. 3:18).

The New Testament does not present us with a normative and rigid pattern of church leadership—institutionalized offices that must be scrupulously maintained at all times and in all places. Instead, the service of leadership arose fairly spontaneously as called for in each new situation. Peter, the rock, stood up and preached his first sermon and, at his bidding, the number of apostles (eyewitnesses to the resurrection) was restored to twelve (Acts 1:15-26). With Christ's great commission (Matt. 28:19-20) still ringing in his ears, he then stood up once more to *preach* his Pentecost sermon, challenging all to repentance and promising the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39). The rapidly growing Spirit-led community devoted itself not only to "the apostles' *teaching*" but also "to *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer." Further, these believers "had everything in common" and "sold property and possessions to *give to anyone who had need*" (Acts 2:42-45, italics added). Preaching or teaching, fellowship and the sacraments, and giving to those in need as stewards of God's gifts—these already point to what *does* appear to be normative for the church of all times: the three dimensions of the church's mission. They are, to use the Greek terms, *kerygma*, *koinonia*, and *diakonia*, which we can describe today in English as gospel proclamation, shepherding in Christian fellowship, and the ministry of mercy and justice. Institutionalized offices have always been shaped around these three elements.

The New Testament reveals permanent dimensions of leadership, not precise and specific offices for all time. This means, for one thing, that we must reexamine our traditional assertion (especially in our liturgical forms) that Acts 6 presents us with the origin of an institutionalized office of deacon. It is possible, of course, that the "seven" were directly involved in "waiting on tables" in some ways, thus exercising a diaconal task. But the context suggests a systemic discrimination in the distribution of food whereby Hebraic Jews were favored over Hellenistic Jews. This injustice would require courageous leadership toward a drastic change of attitude and behavior within the Christian community. The apostles could have taken this on; it was not necessarily outside their "job description," but it was decided instead that the "seven" would do this so that the "twelve" would not be diverted from what their main task was discerned to be: prayer and the ministry of the Word. The situation is dynamic enough to caution us from concluding that

ministers are more important than deacons or that ministers may do the work of deacons, whereas deacons may not do the work of ministers.

So when daily food was not distributed fairly, the “seven” were appointed to make things right. Their office or service received no immediate or specific designation—the need arose and the community saw to it. Later, one of the “seven,” by the name of Stephen, preached a powerful sermon, sparing no words, and was thereupon stoned as a martyr (Acts 6:12-7:60). Another, named Philip, became a traveling preacher (see Acts 8:1, 5-6), later baptizing an Ethiopian eunuch and teaching him “the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). There is nothing in this chapter or in the entire book of Acts that would compel us to believe that the “seven” served in distinctly diaconal roles. There are clear indications, on the other hand, that at least two of the “seven” preached, evangelized, and taught.

The early church was filled with *charismata*, gifts, in new leaders, wherever the Spirit saw fit to bestow them—the most noted, of course, in Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:17-20). Most of the remainder of the book of Acts speaks of this great missionary and teacher, “who was also called Paul” (Acts 13:9). But there was also Barnabas (Acts 9:27); Tabitha (or Dorcas) of Joppa (Acts 9:36); the prophets in Jerusalem sent to Antioch (“one of them, named Agabus,” Acts 11:27-28); “John, also called Mark” (Acts 12:25); “prophets and teachers” in Antioch (Acts 13:1); “elders” in various churches (Acts 14:23), including those in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2) and Ephesus (Acts 20:17); “Judas and Silas, who themselves were prophets” (Acts 15:32); Apollos, the teacher from Alexandria (Acts 18:24-25); and “four unmarried daughters” of “Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven,” who “prophesied” (Acts 21:8-9). In his letters to churches, Paul mentions the *charismata* of prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading, and showing mercy (Rom. 12:6-8), as well as the gifts instilled in persons he calls apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, guides, and tongue-speakers (1 Cor. 12:28-30). When he writes to the church of Ephesus, he refers to Christ’s *donata*, the gift of new leaders: “the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,” who together “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).

All of these people with these particular *charismata* emerged at the prompting of the Spirit to provide the leadership required in the early church. There wasn’t some divinely authorized Church Order ready to spell out exactly who was who, and with what qualifications and requirements for service, and what, precisely, such a person was called upon to do. As Herman Ridderbos writes in his book *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, some of these leaders and their *charismata* tended only over much time to become institutionalized, at the point where the church became convinced that these and not others have “continual and not just incidental significance for the upbuilding of the community” (p. 445). We even see this happening in the Scriptures themselves, when instructions Paul gives much later to Timothy and Titus insist on appointing overseers, deacons, widows, and elders, all complete with requirements for office (1 Tim. 3:2-13, 5:9-21; Titus 1:5-9). And ever since, it appears, the church has been given the freedom to judge anew, in every age and circumstance, how the great commission is to be fulfilled.

Again, we are presented not so much with an exact number and description of the offices but, rather, with three dimensions to fulfilling the great commission. That is because there is One, the great Prophet, Priest, and King, who does all this ministry to the world through his people who are prophets, priests, and kings (Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 12). So leadership or the equipping of the saints is not within the “job description” of one office, or two, or three, but is the shared task of all who are ordained. We wish to emphasize here that Christ does all *his* equipping ministry through these chosen vessels. There is a sacredness to being called to serve as officebearers, and all who respond to that calling are therefore ordained by the church as representatives of the risen Lord. Scripture directs believers to “have confidence in [their] leaders and submit to their authority” (Heb. 13:17). The assignment of specific tasks to distinct offices is for the church to sort out in its context in every new age. Whatever that configuration is, however, these leaders and equippers are all publicly ordained—they have been called by Christ through the congregation to govern “according to the spiritual order that our Lord has taught us in his Word” and they are to be “elders and deacons [who] along with the pastors . . . make up the council of the church” (Belgic Confession, Art. 30).

Especially after the Constantinian change, the church’s leadership structure took on more specific institutionalized forms that often took their cues from civil government as well as revelation: bishops, archbishops, a pope at the helm, and local deacons and acolytes and, down the road, a host of other offices, as time went on, hierarchically arranged. The Reformation took its cues especially from Scripture but also from its entirely new cultural climate. Luther held to one office—the preaching bishop alone with the remainder of ecclesiastical government deposited into the hands of civil princes. Calvin preferred the ministers of the Word supplemented by civil, then, later, ecclesiastical elders or overseers and two kinds of deacons—administrative as well as medical (the “*hospitaliers*”) (H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*, Vol. I, pp. 528, 568). In their wake came the Continental Reformed traditions that featured the four offices of doctor, minister of the Word, elder, and deacon, and Presbyterian traditions that insisted on the priority of preaching and teaching elders. There is room to adapt and change as circumstances require. That explains some significant differences between Presbyterian and Reformed polity. It is also why the current Church Order of the CRCNA does not speak of Scripture *requiring* the existence of certain offices and those offices only, but states that at this time in the denomination’s history we *recognize* the offices of minister of the Word, commissioned pastor, elder, and deacon. And to avoid all hierarchy among them, the Church Order proceeds to assert that these offices “differ from each other only in mandate and task, not in dignity and honor” (Art. 2). All this points not only to three-dimensional leadership structures, but also to what all offices share—equipment of the saints. That is the scripturally given mandate of Ephesians 4 laid upon all leaders.

Equipment of the saints—that is the “unity that the offices share” (*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 625). It is, as previously noted, what leads the Belgic Confession to state that “there should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and administer the sacraments” (the church lives by the Word proclaimed), and then to add that “there should also be elders and dea-

cons, along with the pastors, to make up the council of the church” (Belgic Confession, Art. 30). It is what drives the definition of the local assembly in the Church Order of the CRCNA: There “shall be a council” composed of all those ordained within the congregation. This council shall perform “those tasks which belong to the common administration of the church, such as the calling of a pastor, the approval of nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern” (Church Order, Art. 35).

Along with this “common administration,” the Church Order provides for distinctiveness or uniqueness of offices. “In every church there shall be a consistory composed of the elders and the minister(s) of the Word” where “tasks which belong distinctively to the office of elder” are dealt with, and there “shall be a diaconate composed of the deacons” where tasks peculiar to their office are exercised (Art. 35). Prior to this article of the Church Order, the mandates given to the four offices are spelled out for ministers of the Word (Art. 11-12), for commissioned pastors (Art. 23-24), and for elders and deacons (Art. 25). And later, in the sections on “The Task and Activities of the Church” as well as “The Admonition and Discipline of the Church,” the Church Order carefully and deliberately assigns responsibilities to the consistory, the diaconate, or the council as a whole (Art. 51-84). For instance, the consistory must provide leadership in the areas of worship, faith nurture, and pastoral care. It must also exercise discipline of members of the congregation. On the other hand, when it comes to “mutual censure” or “special discipline” (suspension or deposition from office), the council as a whole must be involved (Supplement, Art. 82-84). That, like the approval of nomination for church office, is a matter that concerns common administration. Or again, when it comes to the subsection on “Missions” (Art. 73-77), to the church’s exercise of the Great Commission, the Church Order insists that all four offices must play distinctive yet also shared or united roles as the entire congregation is equipped by its leaders for service to the world.

To the extent that ministers, elders, commissioned pastors, and deacons share in equipping the saints for ministry and partake in “common administration,” there is parity of office and “dignity and honor” (Art. 2) in all of the offices—not *equality*, since they do not have completely identical functions or roles to play, but *parity*. The Reformation was decidedly anti-hierarchical in its church political focus. It may initially have employed a functional hierarchy, whereby the preaching of the Word was considered more vital for building up the community than, say, providing resources to the needy. Years later, Reformed churches might have insisted that teaching the tenets of newly recovered belief was absolutely a first priority, such that instruction in the confessions from both pulpit and classroom lectern were considered to be more important than supporting worthy Christian causes. That, in part, might explain why the polity of the Reformed churches sometimes spoke of the “consistory and the deacons” and why the parity of office was recognized within and not among the offices. But the polity of the CRCNA has definitely chosen to recognize parity of office. In this, the CRCNA has not necessarily rejected functional hierarchy. After another economic depression, another world war, or a significant spike in humanitarian crises and needs, it might even for a time place a higher priority on the work of the deacons than the preaching of the Word, be it temporarily.

But the heritage of the Reformation remains—the CRCNA rejects ontological hierarchy of office.

What is also clear is that the CRCNA currently structures local church government so as to distinguish between council, consistory, and diaconate but there is no such distinction when it defines the work of the broader assemblies, classis and synod (Art. 39-50). The distinctive tasks of the offices at the local level are not assigned to separate bodies at the regional or binational level. The reason for that, of course, is that the saints, the members of the congregation, are equipped for their ministry at the local level, but not directly at meetings of classis or synod. These are the soldiers fulfilling the Great Commission. Broader assemblies are designed to be like strategy sessions in the generals' quarters. They are there to deal with matters of common concern that arise from the churches or from reports on activities that are shared at a regional or binational level. It is, one could say, the common administration of the church at a supralocal level. It is all about equipping the saints for ministry.

As the previous Office of Deacon Task Force pointed out, the delegation of deacons to broader assemblies "is not about equal representation, as if there should be some balance of power"; rather, "it is about the *full* representation of the *whole* church which these offices represent. When deacons are missing from major assemblies, the full voice of the church is not heard, nor is the full ministry of the church under discussion. The purpose of the major assemblies is not simply governance and adjudication but deliberation about the church's character and ministry, a deliberation in which the deacons ought surely to participate" (*Agenda for Synod 2013*, p. 279).

The delegation of deacons to major assemblies is "neither prohibited nor demanded by Scripture and the Reformed confessions," said Synod 1967 (*Acts of Synod 1967*, p. 93), but "practical considerations" led it and subsequent synods away from implementing the idea. What needs to be understood more clearly is that more than just "practical considerations" are at stake. We are bound by our creed to three-dimensional office structures, and by denying access to broader assemblies to any one of them we can only impoverish our shared leadership at the denominational level. This is what led Synod 1997 to recommend the delegation of deacons to classis and what led Synod 2013 to propose the delegation of deacons to synod. These assemblies explained:

Integrated word and deed ministry presents a more effective witness to the world. A number of classes are restructuring to accomplish this goal. The delegation of deacons to their meetings will enable them to do so more fully.  
(*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 621)

Numerous requests over the years have asked that the major assemblies seat deacons in order to have full representation and participation in carrying out the mission of the church.  
(*Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 624)

While it is true that some issues on the agenda of classis or synod are heavily weighted toward one distinctive office, it is also true that in almost every issue all dimensions are present. Sorting out which issues are to be dealt with at different times by elders alone or deacons alone is an impossible task. This is why separate "consistorial" and "diaconal" sessions

at classis or synod are not advisable. Instead, delegates in joint session who are aware of their own distinctive calling can exercise due deference in the deliberation and decision-making (see proposed change to Church Order, Art. 34, below). But all delegates jointly can use their distinctive competencies as they share in the common administration of the church within their region or throughout North America and the world. It is only when common administration is not acknowledged, when deacons are excluded, for example, from sessions of classis or synod, that other supralocal entities like diaconal conferences spring into being. Such entities are useful and may well continue to be useful, even if deacons are delegated to classes. But history has borne out that deacons can be far more effective when they too are delegated to broader assemblies, joining the ministers of the Word, commissioned pastors, and elders in strategizing for the church's mission in the world.

#### **IV. Resources for revitalizing the offices of elder and deacon**

The ultimate purpose of our task force is to propose a revitalization of practice in the offices of deacon and elder within local congregations. Essential to this task of revitalization is the provision of recommended resources and training for churches as they seek to cultivate these areas of ministry. The task force has developed a preliminary recommendation of resources and training for the office of deacon. We are still gathering resources regarding the office of elder, which will be included in our final report.

The 2013 Office of Deacon Task Force (Diakonia Remixed) catalogued a significant list of resources that deacons can use. The following resources assist deacons serving in a more traditional capacity as well as deacons engaged in overseeing significant transformational ministry.

1. Diaconal Ministries of Canada's network of diaconal developers.
2. Strong deacon conferences in many classes, especially in Canada, or regional organizations like Volunteers in Service and Volunteers in Action.
3. Christian Reformed Home Missions' collaboration with community transformation resources in church planting efforts and developing coaches that facilitate the creation of missional communities.
4. Communities First Association's network of community transformation coaching.
5. The 2009 Power of With conference, facilitated by World Renew, demonstrated how churches can work with their community's resources to work for the physical and spiritual transformation of that community.
6. Numerous training events and resources that come from many of the above organizations.
7. The CRC Network site ([network.crcna.org/deacons](http://network.crcna.org/deacons)).

The decision of Synod 2013 to recommend that deacons be seated at classes is a major encouragement for the CRC to engage in ministry from a fresh perspective. At a community level, it means placing new leadership expectations on the local diaconate. At a binational level, it means assuming deacons have input into the diaconal dimension of the CRCNA's ministry

planning. While pointing deacons to current resources may be helpful for training and dialogue, the task force would like to see a fresh level of coordination and planning between the appropriate agencies and institutions of the CRC so that they connect with churches and classes to facilitate dialogue on how to develop this fresh perspective.

In order for deacons to lead ministry in new and fresh ways, it is critical that we not only seat them at our assemblies and integrate their role into our Church Order but also prepare leadership at all levels so that ministry can be carried out with a reenergized perspective. The most critical place for this to be carried out is at the local community and church level.

Numerous college programs today develop skills to prepare people for what can most readily be called *community transformation*. People with this training would be ideal staff to lead or develop the diaconal nature of the church's mission. Making sure these positions are well grounded theologically is important. Surveying our educational institutions on how they can tie the training they are doing into the role of diaconal ministry would serve the church well.

The regional structure and the mandate of Christian Reformed Home Missions makes it an ideal agency to coordinate with community development organizations like Communities First Association and Diaconal Ministries of Canada's Operation Community SCAN. The power that can come from such collaboration has been demonstrated in the 2009 "Power of With" conference mentioned earlier.

At an international level, World Renew has sponsored three assemblies that brought diaconal partners together from around the world. This created a rich learning environment for all involved.

The time seems ripe to pull these multiple pieces together to take on the challenge of learning and growing into the new reality of a revitalized and empowered diaconate. The task force recommends that World Renew and Home Missions, under the guidance of the executive director of the CRCNA, be tasked with the development of strategies that accomplish the following:

- A cataloging of all resources offered by our agencies that support the vision of a reinvigorated diaconate.
- Developing an approach, whether by way of conferences, staff, materials, or other means, that gives energy to the diaconal initiatives of churches, classes, and the denomination.
- To report annual progress on the above to synod through the respective agency reports.

## **V. Proposed changes to Church Order**

An important part of the work of our task force is to propose revisions to the Church Order that will encourage a more robust diaconal ministry in the CRC. The proposed revisions below (noted in *italics>*) are largely based on the work of the previous task force. We reexamined each article in the light of feedback we received from synod, whether as criticism or as call for clarification. In our revisions we also include changes to fulfill our expanded mandate to address the office of elder.

*Current Article 1-a*

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 in the churches “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40), regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities in the following articles.

*Proposed Article 1-a*

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 in the churches “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40) *in order to be equipped “for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph. 4:12)*, regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities in the following articles.

*Ground:* Adding the quotation from Ephesians 4:12 clarifies that the church has a Church Order not merely for the sake of orderliness but for the sake of ministry.

*Current Articles 4-a and -b*

- 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 suitable persons.

*Proposed Articles 4-a and -b*

- a. In calling and electing to an office, the council shall ordinarily present to the congregation a nomination *of suitably gifted persons* 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.

*Ground:* Adding the phrase *suitably gifted* clarifies that suitability for office is a matter of spiritual giftedness.

*Current Article 11*

The calling of a minister of the Word is to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and build up the members of the church of Jesus Christ.

*Proposed 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*.

*Ground:* According to Ephesians 4, it is God who builds up the church through the equipping ministry of those called to office. These changes bring the Church Order in line with the biblical text.

*Current Article 12-a*

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 the elders, shall supervise the congregation and fellow officebearers, exercise admonition and discipline, and see to it that everything is done decently and in order. The minister, with the elders, shall exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism.

*Proposed Article 12-a*

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.

*Ground:* According to Article 30 of the Belgic Confession, ministers of the Word are called to common tasks with elders and deacons in equipping the church. Likewise, the second half of Church Order Article 12-a is intended to give an illustrative list of those tasks that the minister is called to do with other officebearers. Making reference in the article to elders alone is confusing, since some of the tasks belong to other officebearers as well, such as supervising fellow officebearers (see Church Order Art. 82-84, and Supplement, Art. 82-84) and exercising pastoral care (see Art. 65). The proposed language removes this confusion by making a generic reference to other officebearers and including diaconal outreach in the tasks that the minister does in common with other officebearers.

*Current Article 25-a*

a. The elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designated by the council. As a rule a specified number of them shall retire from office each year. The 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.

*Proposed Article 25-a*

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, accountability for ministry outcomes, and the regular infusion of gifts.* The 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.

*Ground:* While this article was written to give councils flexibility in the length of terms of office, the “as a rule” language has suggested that flexibility is discouraged, and this has hindered the equipping work of some officebearers in some contexts. The proposed revision does not change the meaning of the article—terms should still be limited to a specified period of time—but it does better emphasize flexibility and the purpose for which that flexibility should be employed.

*Current Article 25-b*

b. The elders, with the minister(s), shall oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow officebearers, shall exercise admonition and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, shall participate in and promote evangelism, and shall defend the faith. The elders also shall nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation in the Lord’s Supper through encouragement, instruction, and accountability.

*Proposed Article 25-b*

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.

*Ground:* The proposed revision adds a clearer expression of the elders’ calling as shepherds to positively build up the church of Christ.

*Current Article 25-c*

c. The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people, especially to those who belong to the community of believers, and shall stimulate the members of Christ’s church to faithful, obedient stewardship of their resources on behalf of the needy—all with words of biblical encouragement and testimony which assure the unity of word and deed.

*Proposed Article 25-c*

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.*

*Ground:* The proposed revision gives a more comprehensive description of the mandate for deacons as understood and practiced by many

diaconates and described in various deacon handbooks and other resources and in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons.

*Current Article 34*

The major assemblies are composed of officebearers who are delegated by their constituent minor assemblies. The minor assemblies shall provide their delegates with proper credentials which authorize them to deliberate and vote on matters brought before the major assemblies. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which the delegate or the church of which the delegate is a member is particularly involved.

*Proposed Article 34*

The major assemblies are composed of officebearers who are delegated by their constituent minor assemblies. The minor assemblies shall provide their delegates with proper credentials which authorize them to deliberate and vote on matters brought before the major assemblies. *In any matter that lies almost exclusively within the mandate(s) of one or two of the offices, the delegates shall exercise due deference in deliberation.* A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which the delegate or the church of which the delegate is a member is particularly involved.

*Ground:* The proposed language addresses the concern that when all offices are seated in major assemblies, some matters brought to the floor will lie largely outside the calling of one or two of the offices. Likewise, the article should instruct all delegates to be mindful of their gifts and mandate and defer in deliberation to those most competent.

*Current Article 35-a*

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 the calling of a pastor, the approval of nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern, are the responsibility of the council.

*Proposed Article 35-a*

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.

*Ground:* Since the article gives only an illustrative list of matters of common concern, there is no need for the article to be comprehensive. However, the proposed language recognizes that the promotion of the church's mission should be preeminent in the common administration of the church.

*Current Article 35-b*

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.

*Proposed Article 35-b*

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.*

*Ground:* The proposed language codifies a common practice: that of elders reporting on their work to the council, just as deacons do (Art. 35-c). This parallel practice between the diaconate and the consistory follows from the principle of the parity of office and from Belgic Confession, Article 30, in which we confess that the governance of the church belongs to the council. A report from the elders to the council also facilitates council oversight of the activities of the elders, as required by the practices of mutual censure and special discipline, both of which are the tasks of the council (Art. 35-a; Supplement, Art. 82-84).

*Note:* Synod 2013 decided to propose changes to Article 40-a and its Supplement to Synod 2015 (see *Acts of Synod 2013*, pp. 623-24).

*Current Article 42-b*

b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of office-bearers chosen for their experience and counsel, with teams composed of two ministers or one minister and one elder. Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

*Proposed Article 42-b*

b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of office-bearers chosen for their experience and counsel. *Team composition shall include a minister of the Word and at least one other officebearer.* Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

*Grounds:*

1. Oversight of officebearers belongs in the hands of ministers, elders, and deacons at the congregational level (see Art. 35-b and Supplement, Art. 82-84), and the same should be true at the classical level, especially when all three offices are delegated to the classis.
2. Some matters for which church visitors may be required are matters that lie primarily within the mandate of the office of deacon, and the churches would benefit from having an experienced deacon as one

of the church visitors, which the proposed article allows, but does not require.

*Note:* Synod 2013 decided to propose changes to Article 45 to Synod 2015 (see *Acts of Synod 2013*, p. 624).

*Current Article 62*

Offerings for benevolence shall be received regularly in the worship services. Offerings also shall be received for other ministries of the congregation and the joint ministries of the churches.

*Proposed 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.*

*Ground:* The proposed language offers a more comprehensive description of the nature of offerings and promotes meeting the needs of the poor in a variety of ways—through more than just offerings of benevolence.

*Current Article 64-a*

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, and to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers.

*Proposed Article 64-a*

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.*

*Ground:* The proposed language gives a more comprehensive and missional description of the purpose of nurturing faith in adults, in line with the meaning of Ephesians 4:12.

*Articles 73-77*

*Current Articles 73-a and -b*

a. In obedience to Christ's Great Commission, the churches must bring the gospel to all people at home and abroad, in order to lead them into fellowship with Christ and his church.

b. In fulfilling this mandate, each council shall stimulate the members of the congregation to be witnesses for Christ in word and deed and to support the work of home and world missions by their interest, prayers, and gifts.

*Current Articles 74-a and -b*

a. Each church shall bring the gospel to unbelievers in its own community. This task shall be sponsored and governed by the council. This task may be executed, when conditions warrant, in cooperation with one or more neighboring churches.

b. Each church shall carry on a ministry of mercy. The deacons shall enable the needy under their care to make use of Christian institutions of mercy. They shall confer and cooperate with diaconates of neighboring churches when this is desirable for the proper performance of their task. They may also seek mutual understandings with agencies in their community which are caring for the needy, so that the gifts may be distributed properly.

*Current Articles 75-a and -b*

a. The classes shall, whenever necessary, assist the churches in their local evangelistic programs. The classes themselves may perform this work of evangelism when it is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches. To administer these tasks, each classis shall have a classical home missions committee.

b. The classes shall, whenever necessary, assist the churches in their ministry of mercy. The classes themselves may perform this ministry when it is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches. To administer this task, each classis shall have a classical diaconal committee.

*Current Articles 76-a and -b*

a. Synod shall encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of evangelism, and shall also carry on such home missions activities as are beyond their scope and resources. To administer these activities synod shall appoint a denominational home missions committee, whose work shall be governed by synodical regulations.

b. Synod shall encourage and assist congregations and classes in their ministry of mercy, and shall carry on such work as is beyond their scope and resources. Synod shall appoint a diaconal committee to administer the denominational ministry of mercy. The work of this committee shall be governed by synodical regulations.

*Current Supplement, Article 76-a*

The synodical regulations referred to in Article 76 may be found in the Mission Order of the Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions (*Acts of Synod 1992*, pp. 741-46 and subsequent revisions thereof).

*Current Articles 77-a and -b*

a. Synod shall encourage and assist the joint world mission work of the churches by regulating the manner in which this task is to be performed, providing for its support, and encouraging the congregations to call and support missionaries. To administer these activities, synod shall appoint a denominational world missions committee, whose work shall be governed by synodical regulations.

b. The denominational diaconal committee shall extend the ministry of mercy of the congregations and classes worldwide.

*Current Supplement, Article 77-a*

Synod regulates the work of the world missions committee by way of the Constitution and decisions of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.

*Proposed Article 73: The Church's Mandate to Ministry*

*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.*

*Ground:* The proposed change states the purpose of the article more succinctly. Word and deed together are integral for a full expression of the church's obedience to the Great Commission. A broader scope to Article 73-b has been moved to Article 74-c.

*Proposed Articles 74-a through -d: The Ministry of the Congregation*

*a. Each church shall bring the gospel to non-Christians within the unique context of its own 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 her 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 her task.*

*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.*

*Grounds:* This emphasizes the integration of word and deed in the ministry of the church at the congregational level. It also captures the essence of the proposals in the Office of Deacon Task Force report (2013), but with less complicated wording.

*Proposed Articles 75-a and -b: The Ministry of the Classis*

*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 missionary task.*

*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.*

*Grounds:* This emphasizes the integration of word and deed in the ministry of the church at the classical level. It also captures the essence of the proposals in the Office of Deacon Task Force report (2013), but with less complicated wording.

*Proposed Article 76: Denominational Ministries*

*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 national 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.*

*Grounds:* This emphasizes the integration of word and deed in the ministry of the church at the denominational level. It also captures the essence of the proposals in the Office of Deacon Task Force report (2013), but with less complicated wording; and it provides flexibility as the CRCNA is currently studying structure for ministries.

It is proposed that Supplement, Article 76-a be removed.

*Proposed Article 77: Synodical Governance of Ministries*

*Synod shall regulate the work of denominational ministries by way of the Constitution and decisions of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.*

It is proposed that Supplement, Article 77-a be removed.

*Ground:* The proposed change includes and expands upon the current Supplement Articles 76-a and 77-a.

## **VI. Proposed changes to Rules for Synodical Procedure**

The proposed amendment to Church Order Article 34 that calls for delegates to “exercise due deference in deliberation” calls for an accompanying change in the Rules for Synodical Procedure. The following proposed change specifies how the president and delegates to synod will see that “due deference” is actually extended. The task force recommends the following additions to the duties of the president of synod and the delegates to synod when issues are discussed (changes indicated by *italics*):

*Proposed new section II, A, 4*

*4. The president shall ensure that the minister, elder, or deacon delegates exercise due deference when matters arise that do not belong to common administration but lie almost exclusively within the mandate(s) of one or two of the offices.*

*Note:* The present section II, A, 4 and subsequent sections would then be renumbered 5, 6, 7, and so forth.

*Proposed new section VIII, J, 2*

*2. All delegates participate in the deliberations on matters of common administration. If matters arise that lie almost exclusively within the mandate(s) of one or two of the offices, the delegates representing the other office(s) shall exercise due deference.*

*Note:* The present section VIII, J, 2 and subsequent sections would then be renumbered 3, 4, 5, and so forth.

## **VII. Proposed Changes to the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons**

It is proposed that the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons be updated to be consistent with the proposed changes in the Church Order. Changes from the current form (1982) are noted in **boldface text**.

## 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 in this congregation. Those appointed to the office of elder are [names]. Those appointed to the office of deacon are [names].

To express your acceptance of these offices, you are asked to stand, and here in the presence of God and his church, to answer the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation God himself is calling you to these holy offices?

Do you believe that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?

Do you subscribe to the doctrinal standards of this church, rejecting all teaching which contradicts them?

Do you promise to do the work of your offices faithfully, in a way worthy of your calling and in submission to the government and discipline of the church?

*Answer [by each officebearer]:* I do, God helping me.

*The officiating minister shall then say [the laying on of hands at this point is optional]:*

God our heavenly Father, who has called you to these sacred offices, guide you by his Word, equip you with his Spirit, and so prosper your ministries that his church may increase and his name be praised. Amen.

#### *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 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.

#### *Charge to the Congregation*

I charge you, people of God, to receive these officebearers as Christ's gift to the church.

Recognize in them the Lord's provision for healthy congregational life. Hold them in honor; take their counsel seriously; respond to them with obedience and respect; accept their help with thanks. **Wholeheartedly participate in the ministries into which they lead you.** Sustain them in prayer and encourage them with your support, especially when they feel the burden of their office. Acknowledge them as the Lord's servants among you.

Do you, congregation, pledge to receive them as you have been charged?

*Answer [by the congregation in unison]:* We do, God helping us.

#### *Prayer*

Our merciful Father in heaven, we thank you that you have provided faithful and gifted people to serve as elders and deacons. As these new officebearers assume their responsibilities, fill them with your Spirit, endow them with your wisdom, and grant them strength. Make them faithful workers in your vineyard. Under their guidance may your church grow in every spiritual grace, in faith which is open and unashamed, and in the committed service that promotes your reign in the world. Help them to perform their duties with enthusiasm and humility. In their work, grant them a sense of sustained awe which is rooted in daily adoration of you, their Lord. Through them may your name be honored and your church be served.

Help us, your people, to accept them gladly, encourage them always, and respect them for the sake of your precious Son, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

#### *Grounds:*

1. These changes incorporate important aspects of the role of deacons as developed by the Office of Deacon Task Force in 2013, many of which deacons are already doing.
2. This proposed form includes more references to common aspects of the offices as stated in the Church Order (see, among others, Art. 4, 5, 9,

10, 14-18, 32, 35-38, 40, and 66) and outlined in the section on Parity of Office within this report.

3. This proposed form provides more appropriate Scripture references regarding the role of elders.

### **VIII. Deacon/diaconate, elder/consistory, council, classis, and synod roles and responsibilities from the Church Order**

We offer the following summary of the various roles and responsibilities as found in the current Church Order to assist the reader in understanding the full scope of responsibilities of the various offices and assemblies:

#### *A. Deacon/diaconate*

The deacon's role and responsibilities:

1. Be an adult confessing member who meets the biblical requirements (Church Order Article 3-a)
2. Be officially called and ordained or installed to hold and exercise office in the church (Art. 3-b)
3. Signify agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Art. 5)
4. Serve for a limited time (Art. 25-a)
5. Represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people, stimulate members to faithful stewardship on behalf of the needy (Art. 25-c)
6. Lead the congregation in ways that inspire faithful stewardship of time, talent, and resources (*proposed* Art. 25-c)
7. Call the members to be ambassadors of reconciliation in all areas of life (*proposed* Art. 25-c)
8. Create and encourage participation in structures and ministries that use member gifts in areas of compassion, community transformation, creation care, justice, stewardship, and pastoral care, both locally and globally (*proposed* Art. 25-c)
9. Give an account of the diaconate's work to the council (Art. 35-c)
10. Meet at least once per month (Art. 36-a)
11. Extend pastoral care to all members (Art. 65)
12. Enable the needy under their care to make use of Christian institutions of mercy (Art. 74-b)
13. Confer and cooperate with diaconates of neighboring churches (Art. 74-b)
14. Seek mutual understandings with agencies in their community that are caring for the needy (Art. 74-b)
15. Be subject to general and special discipline (Art. 82)
16. Never lord it over another officebearer (Art. 85)

#### *B. Elder/consistory*

The elder's role and responsibilities:

1. Be an adult confessing member who meets the biblical requirements (Art. 3-a)
2. Be officially called and ordained or installed to hold and exercise office in the church (Art. 3-b)
3. Signify agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Art. 5)

4. Supervise, with the minister, the congregation and fellow officebearers, exercise admonition and discipline, see that everything is done decently and in order, exercise pastoral care over the congregation, engage in and promote the work of evangelism (Art. 12-a and 65)
5. Give approval for a commissioned pastor to serve beyond their specific field of labor (Art. 23-e)
6. Serve for a limited time (Art. 25-a)
7. Oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow officebearers, exercise admonition and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, participate in and promote evangelism, defend the faith, nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation in the Lord's Supper through encouragement, instruction, and accountability (Art. 25-b)
8. Give an account of its work to the council (*proposed* Art. 35-b)
9. Meet at least once per month (Art. 36-a)
10. Regulate the worship services (Art. 52-a)
11. Ensure that the principles and elements of worship approved by synod are observed (Art. 52-b)
12. Appoint those who lead worship services or read a sermon (Art. 53-a and -b)
13. Approve sermons read in a worship service (Art. 53-b)
14. Ensure that baptism is requested and administered to children of confessing members as soon as feasible (Art. 56)
15. Supervise participation in the Lord's Supper (Art. 59-a)
16. Receive testimony of faith, life, and doctrine of those who make a public profession of faith (Art. 59-b)
17. Examine persons from other denominations and determine how to admit them as confessing members (Art. 59-f)
18. Supervise the instruction of youth in Scripture, the creeds, and the confessions of the church (Art. 63-b)
19. Supervise the instruction of adult members (Art. 63-b)
20. Instruct and admonish those under the elders' spiritual care to marry only in the Lord (Art. 69-a)
21. Encourage a spirit of mutual accountability, calling the congregation away from favoritism, division, and selfishness toward hospitality, forgiveness, and unity within the body, especially in conjunction with participation in the Lord's Supper as mandated in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 (Art. 79-b)
22. Instruct and remind the members of the church of their responsibility and foster a spirit of love and openness within the fellowship so that erring members may be led to repentance and reconciliation (Art. 79-c)
23. Exercise the authority that Christ has given to his church regarding sins of a public nature or those brought to its attention according to Matthew 18:15-17 (Art. 80)
24. Faithfully disciple members who have sinned in life or doctrine (Art. 81-a)
25. Exclude from membership in the church of Christ those who persist in their sin (Art. 81-a)
26. Inform the congregation and encourage its involvement in both the exclusion from and the readmission to membership (Art. 81-d)

27. Be subject to general and special discipline (Art. 82)
28. Never lord it over another officebearer (Art. 85)

C. *Council*

The council's role and responsibilities:

1. Present officebearer nominations to the congregation (Art. 4-a)
2. Give the congregation an opportunity to direct attention to suitably gifted persons for nomination (Art. 4-b)
3. Supervise the election of officebearers by the congregation and establish election regulations (Art. 4-c)
4. Ordain or install officebearers (Art. 4-d)
5. Stipulate, via regulation, occasions that officebearers shall signify agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Art. 5)
6. Nominate and call a minister; seek approval of classical counselor; sign the letter of call (Art. 9)
7. Provide ecclesiastical testimonial of doctrine and life for a former minister (Art. 10-b)
8. Give consent for a minister of the Word to leave the congregation for another church (Art. 14-a)
9. Provide for the proper support of its minister(s) (Art. 15)
10. Give approval for and supervise a minister on a temporary leave of absence from service to the congregation (Art. 16)
11. Initiate the release of a minister from active ministerial service in a congregation (Art. 17-a)
12. Provide for the support of a released minister (Art. 17-b)
13. Approve the retirement of a minister (Art. 18-a)
14. Declare a minister emeritus to be eligible for call if the reasons for retirement no longer exist (Art. 18-c)
15. Give approval for a commissioned pastor to continue to serve a newly organized church (Art. 23-b)
16. Directly supervise commissioned pastors (Art. 23-b)
17. Make proper provision for receiving communications, preparing agenda and acts, keeping files and archives, and conducting the financial transactions of the council (Art. 32-c)
18. Provide for the safeguarding of the church's property through proper incorporation (Art. 32-d)
19. Be responsible for tasks that belong to the common administration of the church, such as the calling of a pastor, the approval of nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern (Art. 35-a)
20. Meet at least once per month (Art. 36-a)
21. Exercise mutual censure at least four times per year, assessing and encouraging each other in the performance of their official duties (Art. 36-b)
22. Seek the cooperation of the congregation in the election of officebearers, invite congregational judgment about major matters, call an annual meeting of members (Art. 37)
23. Have the authority to make and carry out final decisions (Art. 37)

24. Consult with classis in the distribution of assets when disbanding (Art. 38-d)
25. Delegate minister/elder/deacon to classis (Art. 40-a)
26. Issue a certificate concerning a confessing member's doctrine and life when the member moves to another church (Art. 66-a)
27. Diligently encourage members to establish and maintain good Christian schools (Art. 71)
28. Urge parents to have their children educated in harmony with a biblical, Reformed vision of Christ's lordship over all creation (Art. 71)
29. Stimulate the members of the congregation to be witnesses for Christ in word and deed and to support the work of home and world missions (Art. 73-b)
30. Sponsor and govern the bringing of the gospel to unbelievers in its own community (Art. 74-a)

*D. Classis*

The classis's role and responsibilities:

1. Stipulate, via regulation, occasions on which officebearers shall signify agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Art. 5)
2. Ensure that ecclesiastical regulations have been observed when calling a minister (Art. 9)
3. Receive the account of the classical counselor regarding call of a minister (Art. 9)
4. Approve the ordination of a candidate for the ministry of the Word (Art. 10-a)
5. Examine a candidate for the ministry of the Word concerning doctrine and life according to synodical regulations (Art. 10-a)
6. Approve the installation of a minister (Art. 10-b)
7. Provide ecclesiastical testimonial of doctrine and life for a former minister of the classis (Art. 10-b)
8. Determine whether the work of a minister in other work is consistent with the calling of a minister (Art. 12-c)
9. Release a minister of the Word who resigns from the ministry of the CRC to enter a ministry outside the denomination (Art. 14-b)
10. Give approval for a minister of the Word to be released from office to enter upon a nonministerial vocation (Art. 14-c)
11. Give approval for a former minister of the Word who was released from office to be declared eligible for call and conduct an interview that examines the circumstances surrounding the release and the renewed desire to serve in ministry (Art. 14-e)
12. Give approval for a minister to obtain primary or supplemental income by means of other employment (Art. 15)
13. Give approval for a minister to be released from ministry (Art. 17-a)
14. Give approval for the support of a council of a released minister (Art. 17-b)
15. Declare a minister of the Word who has been released from active ministerial service in a congregation to be released from the ministerial office based on specified criteria (Art. 17-c and -d)
16. Approve the retirement of a minister (Art. 18-a)

17. Declare a minister emeritus to be eligible for call if the reasons for retirement no longer exist (Art. 18-c)
18. Coordinate financial aid for those seeking to become ministers of the Word who are in need of it (Art. 21)
19. Give approval for commissioned pastors to serve in various capacities (Art. 23-b and -c)
20. Give approval for a commissioned pastor to serve beyond their specific field of labor (Art. 23-e)
21. Defines rules for classical procedure (Art. 28-c)
22. Make proper provision for receiving communications, preparing agenda and acts, keeping files and archives, and conducting the financial transactions of classis (Art. 32-c)
23. Provide for the safeguarding of classis property through proper incorporation (Art. 32-d)
24. Appoint a classical interim committee to act for classis in matters that cannot await action by the classis itself (Art. 33-b)
25. Designate a neighboring council for the care of a group of believers among whom no council can yet be constituted (Art. 38-a)
26. Give approval for a council to be constituted for the first time (Art. 38-b)
27. Give approval for a congregation to disband or revert to unorganized status (Art. 38-d)
28. Give approval for the merger of two or more councils and congregations (Art. 38-e)
29. Give approval for churches uniting to form union congregations (Art. 38-g)
30. Be defined as a group of neighboring churches (Art. 39)
31. Meet at least every four months unless determined to be impractical due to great distances (Art. 40-b)
32. Be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel and advice to churches; appoint church visitors to visit each church yearly; appoint classical counselors to provide advice to any church in the process of calling a minister of the Word (Art. 42-a)
33. Maintain a student fund and a Classical Ministerial Leadership Team (Art. 43-a)
34. Grant the right to exhort within its bounds (Art. 43-b)
35. If so desired, take counsel or joint action with neighboring classes (Art. 44-a)
36. If so desired, organize into an ecclesiastical assembly with other classes (Art. 44-b)
37. Delegate ministers and elders *and deacons* to synod (*proposed* Art. 45)
38. Nominate synodical deputies (Art. 48-a)
39. Approve an ordained person to administer the sacraments (Art. 55)
40. Assist the churches in their local evangelistic programs, administered by a classical home missions committee (Art. 75-a)
41. Assist the churches in their ministry of mercy, administered by a classical diaconal committee (Art. 75-b)

## E. Synod

The synod's role and responsibilities:

1. Stipulate, via regulation, occasions on which officebearers shall signify agreement with the doctrine of the church by signing the Covenant for Officebearers (Art. 5)
2. Directly appoint ministers of the Word (Art. 12-b)
3. Ratify the appointment of a minister of the Word to a local church (Art. 12-b)
4. Establish regulations for ministers to be released from active ministerial service (Art. 17-a)
5. Govern a theological seminary through a board of trustees appointed by synod (Art. 19)
6. Establish regulations for students to receive licensure to exhort in public worship services (Art. 22)
7. Define rules for synodical procedure (Art. 28-c)
8. Establish rights for other appeals and adopt rules for processing them (Art. 30-b)
9. Make proper provision for receiving communications, preparing agenda and acts, keeping files and archives, and conducting the financial transactions of synod (Art. 32-c)
10. Provide for the safeguarding of the property of the Christian Reformed Church in North America through proper incorporation (Art. 32-d)
11. Appoint the Board of Trustees to act for synod in matters that cannot await action by synod itself (Art. 33-b)
12. Establish the procedure and regulations for a non-Christian Reformed congregation to affiliate with the Christian Reformed Church (Art. 38-c)
13. Establish the process to follow when a council decides to disaffiliate from the denomination (Art. 38-f)
14. Approve the organization of a new classis and the redistricting of classes (Art. 39)
15. Approve the authority, jurisdiction, and mandate of a classical level ecclesiastical assembly (Art. 44-b)
16. Be defined as an assembly representing the churches of all the classes (Art. 45)
17. Meet annually (Art. 46-a)
18. Be responsible for the adoption of the creeds, the Church Order, and the principles and elements of worship; approve the liturgical forms, the *Psalter Hymnal*, and the Bible versions suitable for use in worship (Art. 47)
19. Appoint ministers to serve as synodical deputies (Art. 48-a)
20. Appoint a committee to encourage ecumenical relationships with other Christian churches (Art. 49-a)
21. Designate the churches with whom the Christian Reformed Church in North America is in ecumenical fellowship and dialogue, and designate the ecumenical organizations in which the Christian Reformed Church holds membership or significantly participates (Art. 49-b)
22. Send delegates to ecumenical bodies (Art. 50-a)
23. Present matters to ecumenical gatherings (Art. 50-b)
24. Ratify decisions of ecumenical bodies (Art. 50-c)

25. Encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of evangelism (Art. 76-a)
26. Appoint and regulate a denominational home missions committee (Art. 76-a)
27. Encourage and assist congregations and classes in their ministry of mercy (Art. 76b)
28. Appoint and regulate a diaconal committee to administer the denominational ministry of mercy (Art. 76-b)
29. Encourage and assist the joint world mission work of the churches, provide for its support, and encourage the congregations to call and support missionaries (Art. 77-a)
30. Appoint and regulate a denominational world missions committee (Art. 77-a)
31. Develop guidelines for reinstatement to office for those deposed for acts of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct (Art. 84)
32. Revise Church Order (Art. 86)

### **IX. Recommendations**

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. Chris Ganski, reporter, and Mr. Andrew Ryskamp (staff adviser) when the report of the Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon is addressed.

B. That synod encourage the churches and classes to begin actively engaging with the content of this report prior to submission of the final report to Synod 2015.

Task Force to Study the Offices of Elder and Deacon  
Amanda Bakale  
Roy Berkenbosch  
Henry De Moor  
Chris Ganski, reporter  
Rudy Gonzalez  
Calvin Hoogendoorn  
George Monsma  
Nick Monsma  
Rosetta Polk-Pugh  
Andrew Ryskamp (staff adviser)  
Mick Vanden Bosch  
Terry Woodnorth, chair



### I. Introduction to and overview of the work of the task force

Synod 2011 appointed “a CRCNA Structural and Cultural Review Task Force to conduct a review of the organization, culture, and leadership of the CRCNA” (*Acts of Synod 2011*, p. 864). The mandate of the task force, proposed to synod by the Board of Trustees (BOT), included providing advice to the BOT and/or synod regarding short-, medium-, and long-term measures that would improve the culture, structure, and leadership within the Christian Reformed Church.

The Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture (TFRSC) began its work by listening to a broad array of observations from a variety of persons and groups. In its report to Synod 2012 the task force verified the depth of concern related to the structure and culture of the denomination and identified key issues to address as well as tensions to navigate. The TFRSC shared its findings and initial identification of issues and requested a multiyear framework for fulfilling its mandate. Synod 2012 endorsed the work of the task force and extended the reporting time frame of the task force with the expectation that it would provide annual updates to the Board of Trustees and subsequent synods through 2015.

Some key highlights of the task force’s work to date:

- A. Developed a new position description and leadership profile for the executive director of the CRCNA and provided input and guidance related to search committee formation and timeline.
- B. Worked extensively (along with the interim director of Canadian ministries) at identifying a framing document that entails a definition of and a pathway forward for cultivating binationality in the CRCNA.
- C. Developed a picture of an executive team on which the Canadian ministries director will serve with the executive director of the CRCNA on a senior leadership team. This development underscores the importance of collaboration between senior leaders and will be a key avenue for continued work in binationality.
- D. Developed a position description for a deputy executive director of the CRCNA and provided input and guidance regarding the formation of a search committee and a timeline for the search process.

E. Developed a structure proposal to the Board of Trustees by which an executive team could implement the mission of the Christian Reformed Church between meetings of synod.

F. Identified the need for a designation of ongoing ministry priorities that could provide a framework for breaking down “silos” and forming collaboration tables and could inform the CRCNA strategic planning process and communication patterns so that local church and denominational ministries could intersect more and interact better to ultimately serve and support local church ministry.

G. Presented to Synod 2013 and received endorsement for the “Five Streams” proposal for discussion and discernment within the church, its agencies, boards, and planning groups.

H. Provided specific input, guidance, and instruction through synod to the Board of Trustees on developing a “collaborative culture.”

*Note:* Readers of this report are encouraged to reference the reports of the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture to Synods 2012 and 2013 as found in the *Acts of Synod 2012* (pp. 665-88) and the *Agenda for Synod 2013* (pp. 348-93; available online at [www.crcna.org/SynodResources](http://www.crcna.org/SynodResources)). The report to Synod 2013 provides additional background and rationale for the development of the “Five Streams” ministry priorities. The reports and findings tend to be cumulative, and earlier reports are helpful in the ongoing conversation.

## II. Central issue from the TFRSC for Synod 2014 to address

The central matter brought by the task force for discussion and discernment at Synod 2014 is the nature of the relationship and authority of church councils, classes, synod, the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA, and agency boards. We seek to analyze and address the “dual authority and accountability” that currently exists between agency boards and the Board of Trustees, which has at times led to confusion, duplication, suspicion, and tension.

The decisions of synod in the past have been consistent with the Reformed principle of delegated authority: councils, classes, and synod.

Synod 1987 affirmed the following three “foundational principles”:

1. The lordship of Christ is paramount.

Ultimate authority over the church, its agencies, institutions, and ministries resides in the head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. All Christians live and serve in common submission to Christ’s authority. From Christ, her head, the church receives the mandate to find the lost, nurture the found, care for the needy, and serve the lordship of Christ in all areas of creation (Matt. 28:18; Eph. 1:22; Rom. 8:22).

2. The local council possesses “original” authority.

“Original authority” (see Church Order Article 27-a) clearly does not imply autonomous authority. In Reformed church polity, as distinguished from Presbyterian and congregational polity, the council is the source from which church authority flows. The council exercises its authority as the representative of Christ, in submission to the written Word, in the manner in which Christ taught us, and for the welfare of the church and her ministries (Matt. 20:24-28; Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17).