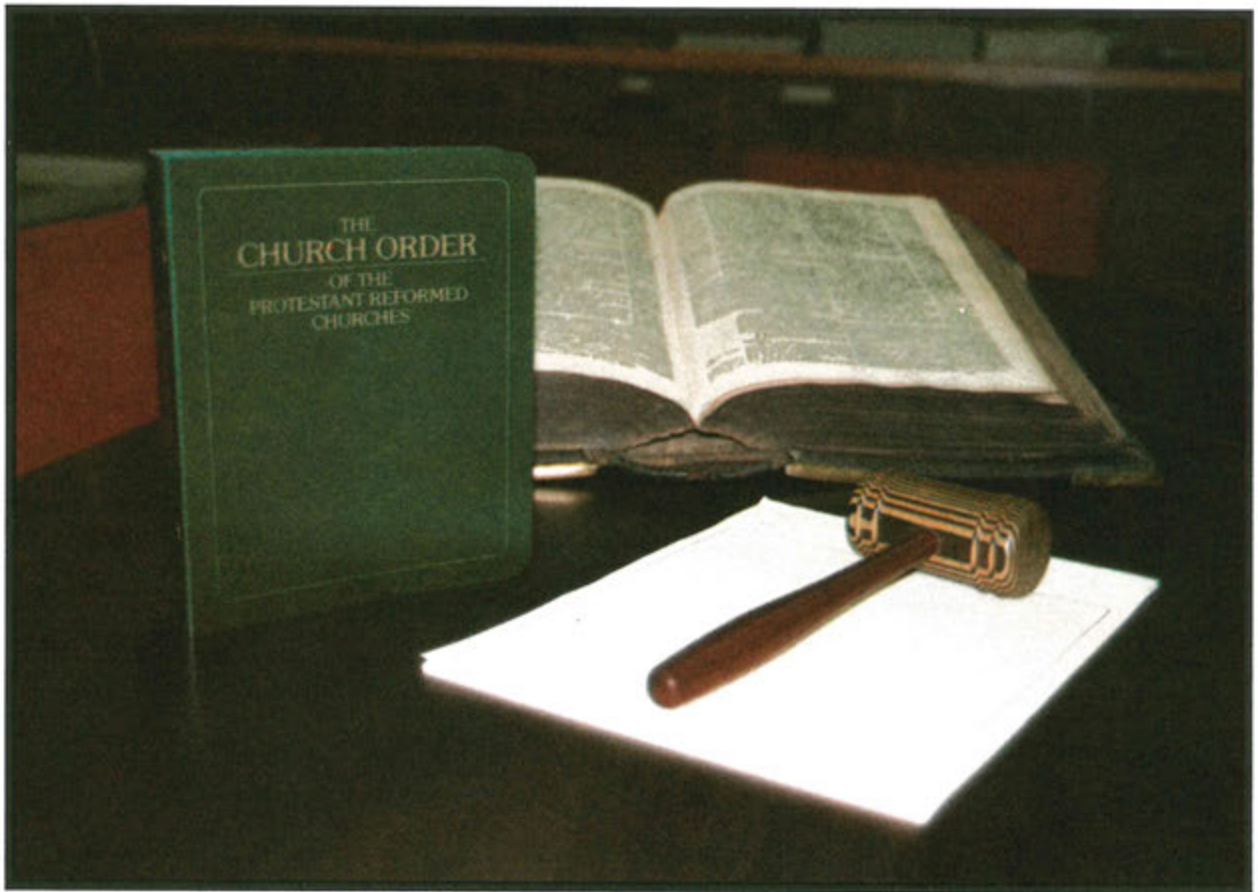


THE STANDARD BEARER

*A Reformed
Semi-Monthly
Magazine*



"We believe that this true church must be governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord hath taught us in His Word."

—Belgic Confession, Article 30

Vol. 68, No. 14
April 15, 1992

Special Issue: REFORMED CHURCH ORDER

Meditation — Rev. James D. Slopsema	
All Things Decently and in Order	315
Editorial — Prof. David J. Engelsma	
Reformed Church Order: Law of Christ	317
Letters	319
Officebearers' Conference	
Mr. Ronald Koole	319
The Value of the Church Order Today	
Rev. Ronald L. Cammenga	320
The Authority of Broader Ecclesiastical Assemblies	
Rev. Ronald J. VanOverloop	323
The Questions of Article 41	
Rev. Russell J. Dykstra	326
Mutual Censure — Article 81 of the Church Order	
Rev. Wayne Bekkering	328
Consistorial Promotion of Christian Schools	
Rev. Arie denHartog	330
Separate Meetings of Elders and Deacons	
Rev. Richard G. Moore	333
News From Our Churches — Mr. Benjamin Wigger	335
Report of Classis West	336



In This Issue ...

The Editorial Committee of the *Standard Bearer* seized the occasion of Classis West's conference on the church order to plan this special issue on the subject. With the exception of Rev. Slopsema's meditation and the editorial, the articles are the addresses given at the conference. We thank the ministers of Classis West for their ready cooperation. Elder Ron Koole of the Loveland, Colorado church reports on the conference itself. The letter reflecting on earlier editorials adds something to the special issue in that it gives the unique Presbyterian viewpoint on an important aspect of church government.

Speaking of which, we have asked the Rev. Chris Coleborn of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia to contribute an article treating the similarity and difference between Reformed and Presbyterian church orders. This is to appear in the next issue of the *SB*. The second installments of some of the longer addresses given at the conference of Classis West will also appear in the next issue, as will the entire address of Rev. Terpstra which, because of space limitations, could not be included in our special issue.

The photograph that adorns the cover of this special issue was taken by the omniscient Managing Editor Don Doezeema. The picture above, and those appearing elsewhere in the issue, are of the various activities of the conference in Doon.

A limited number of copies of this special issue are available for \$1 per copy from the business office.

—DJE

THE STANDARD BEARER

ISSN 0362-4692

Semi-monthly, except monthly during June, July, and August.
Published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.,
4949 Ivanrest Ave., Grandville, MI 49418. Second Class
Postage Paid at Grandville, Michigan.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the Standard Bearer,
P.O. Box 603, Grandville, MI 49468-0603.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: Prof. David J. Engelsma
Secretary: Prof. Robert D. Decker
Managing Editor: Mr. Don Doezeema

DEPARTMENT EDITORS

Rev. Ronald Cammenga, Prof. Robert Decker, Rev. Arie denHartog, Rev. Russell Dykstra, Rev. Carl Haak, Mr. Fred Hanko, Prof. Herman Hanko, Rev. John Heys, Rev. Marvin Kamps, Rev. Steven Key, Rev. Kenneth Koole, Rev. Jason Kortering, Rev. Dale Kuiper, Mr. James Lanting, Rev. George Lubbers, Mrs. MaryBeth Lubbers, Rev. James Slopsema, Rev. Charles Terpstra, Rev. Ronald VanOverloop, Mr. Benjamin Wigger, Rev. Bernard Woudenberg.

EDITORIAL OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
4949 Ivanrest
Grandville, MI 49418

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Don Doezeema
P.O. Box 603
Grandville, MI
49468-0603

PH: (616) 538-1778
(616) 531-1490

FAX: (616) 531-3033

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
NEW ZEALAND OFFICE
The Standard Bearer
c/o Protestant Reformed
Church
B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

EDITORIAL POLICY

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles. Contributions of general interest from our readers and questions for The Reader Asks department are welcome. Contributions will be limited to approximately 300 words and must be neatly written or typewritten, and must be signed. Copy deadlines are the first and fifteenth of the month. All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

REPRINT POLICY

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting of articles in our magazine by other publications, provided: a) that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; b) that proper acknowledgment is made; c) that a copy of the periodical in which such reprint appears is sent to our editorial office.

SUBSCRIPTION POLICY

Subscription price: \$12.00 per year in the U.S., \$15.00 elsewhere. Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue, and he will be billed for renewal. If you have a change of address, please notify the Business Office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of interrupted delivery. Include your Zip or Postal Code.

ADVERTISING POLICY

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$3.00 fee. These should be sent to the Business Office and should be accompanied by the \$3.00 fee. Deadline for announcements is at least one month prior to publication date.

BOUND VOLUMES

The Business Office will accept standing orders for bound copies of the current volume. Such orders are filled as soon as possible after completion of a volume year.

16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm and 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms International.

Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema

All Things Decently and in Order

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.... Let all things be done decently and in order.

I Corinthians 14:33, 40

The church of Corinth had been especially blessed with the special gifts of the Spirit. These gifts included speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, prophecies, and revelations.

However, there was a problem in Corinth with all these gifts. Those endowed with these gifts tended to compete with each other at the public worship so that there was confusion and chaos.

In this fourteenth chapter of his letter to Corinth the apostle Paul gives instruction concerning the orderly use of these gifts, especially the gifts of tongues and prophecy.

Concerning tongues, let no more than two, or possibly three, speak in a service. Let them speak only when one is present with the gift of interpretation, so that the whole church may be edified. If there is none to interpret, let the one with the gift of tongues speak to himself and to God but not in the public worship.

Concerning prophecy, let two or three prophesy. Let the rest of the congregation judge and discern its truth. Should anything be revealed to one who sits (i.e., an elder or minister), let the one who began to prophesy first hold his peace and yield. Let those who prophesy do so one by one.

In all this let the women keep silence. It is not permitted for women to speak in the public worship of the church. If women will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.

It was necessary that the chaos that prevailed in the worship of Corinth cease and that order be restored. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

Let all things, therefore, be done decently and in order.

There was confusion in other areas of the life of the Corinthian church as well. The congregation was badly divided by a party spirit. An incestuous relation continued unchecked in the church. There were lawsuits among the members of the church. The Lord's Supper had degenerated into a feast from which some were wrongfully excluded and at which others became drunk. There was also strife and confusion occasioned by questions of marriage and eating meats offered to idols.

These also are the concern of Paul.

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

Let all things, therefore, be done decently and in order.

* * * * *

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

This is a general truth that has broader application than just the public worship or life of the church.

God is the author of peace because He is the God of peace within Himself. God is triune: three persons subsisting in the one divine Being. Among these three (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) there is no confusion,

discord, or disorder. There is only perfect love manifesting itself in complete harmony, unity, and peace.

Hence, neither is God the author of confusion or discord among men. He is rather the source of peace.

This is clearly seen in the original creation of man. God created man in His own image. Reflected in man's very being were the virtues and perfections of God. By reason of this creation there existed a most beautiful love between God and man. God was drawn to man, who bore His likeness. Man adored his God and served Him in love according to the laws that God set over him to order his life. There was not confusion, discord, or chaos but peace.

This same peace existed in the beginning among mankind. God originally made two, Adam and Eve, from whom developed the whole human race. Since both Adam and Eve knew the love and peace of God as God's imagebearers, they too were drawn together with cords of perfect love. In their life together there was no strife or conflict but perfect peace, as they demonstrated their love to each other according to the law which God had ordained for their life together.

This peace extended even to the whole earthly creation over which God placed man as king. In that original creation all the creatures of God, great and small, organic and inorganic, were designed to exist in perfect harmony according to certain "laws of nature" which God established. Under the kingship of man, peace prevailed on the earth.

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan.

But then sin entered the world. By the instigation of the devil, Adam and Eve rebelled against God. And the consequences of this original sin have been devastating.

Not only did our first parents, Adam and Eve, lose their original righteousness, so did the whole human race that develops from them. Losing the image of God, the human race has become evil, corrupt, desperately wicked, inclined to hate God and each other.

This, in turn, has led to strife, conflict, and disorder.

There is strife between God and man, as one generation after another demonstrates its contempt of the living God by trampling under foot His commandments. This conflict can only result in the destruction of man in hell.

There is also strife within the human race itself. The evil hatred of heart that has taken hold of fallen man shows itself in jealousy, anger, strife, and conflict on every level of human life: in marriage, in the home, in the state, in business, among the races, among the nations.

The confusion of sin has even fallen upon the creation as a whole. For in consequence of man's original sin, the curse of God came upon the whole universe, disrupting the original peace that prevailed.

From this confusion of sin God has saved His church in Jesus Christ.

In the blood of Jesus Christ God freely forgives His people all their sins. But He also changes them. He delivers them from the power of sin that has taken hold of them. He restores them to His own image in which they were originally created but which they lost in the fall. He makes them righteous and holy as He is. This glorious transformation of heart and soul is only begun in this life. It will be perfected in glory.

The result of this great salvation is that the redeemed of God love the Lord their God. They also love one another for God's sake. They even love the neighbor who continues on in sin without Christ. This love manifests itself in a life of obedience to God

and His commandments, an obedience which brings peace — peace with God, peace among the saints. The redeemed of God even seek to bring this glorious peace to the warmongers of this world, who know not the Lord nor His salvation.

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

* * * * *

In this section of his letter to the Corinthian church the apostle Paul applies this truth specifically to the life and worship of the church.

God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

Let all things in the church, therefore, be done decently and in order.

For the peace of the church God has ordained certain principles which are to govern the life and worship of the church. These principles are found in the New Testament Scriptures, revealed either by the example of the apostolic church or by direct command of God.

*The church order has been
a tremendous blessing
to the Reformed churches
down through the ages.*

Thus, for example, God has ordained that there shall be three offices in the church (minister, elder, and deacon) through which Christ speaks, rules, and provides for the poor in every congregation. There shall be public worship on the Lord's Day, in which the preaching is primary but which also includes the sacraments, prayers, singing, and the giving of alms. There shall be discipline exercised in the church, involving all the members but under the supervision of the office of elder.

When these and other principles laid down by God for the life and worship of the church are neglected, there is confusion, discord, chaos. This is what had happened in the Corinthian church.

When by the grace of God these principles are followed there is de-

cency, good order, and peace.

This is the concern of the apostle Paul.

Let all things be done decently and in order.

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

* * * * *

The principles God has ordained for the good order and peace of the church are reflected in the great church order of Dordrecht, to which this issue of the *Standard Bearer* is devoted.

Some of the rules laid down in the church order of Dordrecht are based directly on the principles God has set down in Scripture for the life and government of the church. Others are practical applications of these principles for the life of the church. Still others are not based at all on these principles but have been made with a view to providing orderliness in the life of the church where God has given the church freedom to do as she deems best.

This church order has been a tremendous blessing to the Reformed churches down through the ages. For it has been the tool of God to provide decency, good order, and peace for the church.

And this is above all precious. □



Rev. Cammenga, Rev. Houck, and
Mr. John VanDenTop (Doon)

Reformed Church Order: Law of Christ

The life and labor of the Protestant Reformed Churches are regulated by a church order. This is the church order adopted for Reformed churches by the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19.

The church order is law for the churches. It is the authoritative standard to which both consistories and church members must conform. There are sanctions for the unruly and disobedient. The member who handles sin in the congregation by broadcasting it from the housetop, or over the telephone, rather than following the way prescribed in Articles 71-74 of the church order, will himself

*The Reformed church order
is the law of Jesus Christ
for His redeemed church.*

be disciplined. The minister who publicly agitates against the decision of his consistory will be censured for schism. The elder who is "captious and ... vehement in speaking" at classis will be silenced and, if need require, disciplined by the president of the assembly. The consistory that refuses to submit to a decision of synod will be set outside the union of the churches of Christ.

The Reformed church order is the law of Jesus Christ for His redeemed church. Christ is King of the church. As King He governs the church. God has laid the government upon His shoulders. Christ orders His spiritual Kingdom with judgment

and justice (Is. 9:6,7). The Reformed church order is an instrument of this governing and ordering.

The church order is not merely a pragmatic code drawn up by 16th and 17th century church politicians. It is not even a useful list of rules hallowed by its many years in the Reformed tradition. The church order is the spiritual polity of King Jesus for His Kingdom.

In all its many fundamental ordinances, the Dordt church order bases itself squarely and directly on Holy Scripture. Its rules concerning the four main aspects of the life of the church — offices; assemblies; supervision of doctrine, sacraments, and ceremonies; and Christian discipline — are the Word of Christ, Holy Scripture. Scripture teaches that Christ's church orders herself and functions in offices. Scripture teaches that the offices are those of minister, elder, and deacon. Scripture teaches the rule of the local congregation by a body of qualified, male elders. Scripture teaches the union of congregations in major assemblies whose decisions are binding. Scripture teaches the excommunication of impenitent sinners by the local congregation after repeated admonitions.

The church order is for the church the will of her Sovereign.

In other important rules, although direct warrant in the Bible is lacking, the church order applies biblical truth wisely. If ministers are called for life and if the churches are bound to provide for the financial support of the ministers, not muzzling the ox that treads the corn, the

churches must provide honorably for emeriti (retired) ministers. Since the children of the church are covenant, baptized children who must be reared in the truth, consistories must see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant. In view of the seriousness of the deposition of officebearers and of the excommunication of members and in view of the wisdom found in the multitude of counselors, the local church should not proceed with deposition and excommunication without the advice of the major assemblies.

Here, also, the church order is Messiah's scepter.

Even as regards those relatively few regulations that derive from Scripture neither directly nor indirectly but are common sense rules for orderly life, adapted to the local situation at a certain time, one should not too quickly conclude that the regulations have nothing to do with the will of Christ. The rulers of the church are authorized by Christ to "establish certain ordinances among themselves

*... the church order
should not be written
in a loose-leaf notebook
but should be engraved
in stone.*

for maintaining the body of the church," as long as these ordinances do not conflict with the institutions of

Christ (Bel. Conf., Art. 32).

In its fundamentals, therefore, the church order of Dordt is the law of Christ for the New Testament church always and everywhere. It is not the law only for churches of mainly Dutch members in North America. It is also the law for the church in Jamaica, the church in Northern Ireland, and the church in Singapore.

It is not a book that can be, or even ought to be, revised every century, much less every ten years. It is as immutable as the will of Christ. As regards the fundamentals, the heart and soul of the church order, as well as the overwhelming mass of its material, the church order should not be written in a loose-leaf notebook but should be engraved in stone. In fact, it is engraved by the Holy Spirit upon the fleshy table of the heart of the true church, the church that acknowledges Jesus Christ as the only Head of the church and manages all things according to the pure Word of God (Bel. Conf., Art. 29).

*There is a papacy
in much of nominally
evangelical Protestantism
that bids fair to outstrip
that of the Roman idol.*

Insofar as any church disregards the church polity set forth in the church order of Dordt, that church fails to subject herself to the Lordship of Christ. She will suffer the consequences.

The law bound up in the Dordt church order is a blessing to the PRC. It is a blessing that is not appreciated nearly enough. Law — the good law of God — is always a blessing to the redeemed saints. Whether in the nation, in the family, in personal life, or in the church, law provides order. Upon order depend stability, peace, and prosperity. The life regulated by the law of Christ is the life of precious, priceless liberty. The opening line of the church order of Dordt matter-of-factly announces the blessing pro-

vided: "For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ"

Disorder in the church is a curse. It is misery for the people. It is dishonoring to Christ, the alleged Ruler of such a tumultuous ecclesiastical outfit.

Disorder plagues the independent, nominally evangelical churches. Rejecting the Dordt church order's leading provisions of the rule of the local congregation by a body of elders and of the mutual subjection of churches to each other in authoritative major assemblies, these churches are constantly exposed to division and uproar. Their life is chaos.

To avoid this anarchy, many flee for refuge to the equal but opposite evil of the hierarchy of the lordly minister. The rule of many of the largest, most popular, nominally evangelical churches in North America today is rule by a man, the preacher. In church as in state, rule by a man, as opposed to rule by law, is the worst form of government possible. There is a papacy in much of nominally evangelical Protestantism that bids fair to outstrip that of the Roman idol. It is incredible, though undeniably a fact, that men and women who profess to be Reformed join these pathetic Protestant papacies. They get then what they have chosen: the lordship of Lew VanderMeer, or of Bill Hybels, or of Jack Hyles. What they turn their back on is the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This is sure: Leaving out of sight the forsaking of the gospel of salvation by sovereign grace, these people are abandoning Reformed Christianity in the matter of church government. For as Harro Hopfl has written in his recent study, *The Christian Polity of John Calvin* (Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 112, "There was nothing Calvin detested more than anyone or any group in a position to exercise a *sic volo sic iubeo* (thus I will, thus I decree)."

As for the charismatic churches with their rejection of all church order in favor of the open-ended guidance of a free-wheeling "Spirit," a Reformed man regards these churches

with an aversion bordering on dread. Theirs is a church life of lawlessness.

The Dordt church order, as the law of Christ, is a blessing in the life of the Reformed church that practices it. As is always the case with law in the life of the redeemed, the blessing of the church order is nothing less than the service of the gospel. The church order is instrumental in the maintaining of the gospel in the Reformed churches. This is the claim that was made for the church order that John Calvin gave to the church in Geneva in the preface to the "Ecclesiastical Ordinances" of 1541:

... having considered that it is a thing worthy of commendation above all else that the doctrine of the holy Gospel of our Lord should be carefully preserved in its purity and the Christian Church properly maintained ... which cannot be done unless there is a certain rule and method of living by which each estate attends to the duty of its office: for this reason it has seemed to us advisable that the spiritual government of the kind which our Lord demonstrated and instituted by His Word should be set out in good order so that it may be established and observed among us. And accordingly we have made it a fixed rule to observe and maintain in our city and territory the ecclesiastical polity which follows, since we see that it is taken from the Gospel of Jesus Christ (*The Register of the Company of Pastors of Geneva in the Time of Calvin*, ed. and tr. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, Eerdmans, 1966, p. 35).

The law of Christ standing in the service of the gospel of Christ — this is the church order of Dordt.

Rightly then may the members of these Churches express their love for the PRC in the words of number 350 in *The Psalter* thus: "For there is judgment's royal seat, Messiah's sure and lasting throne" — Reformed church order. □

— DJE

Letters

● Church Government in the Presbyterian Tradition

I have been heartened by your consistent stand for the ancient landmarks, most recently church government (cf. the *Standard Bearer*, Feb. 1, Feb. 15, March 1). I wait with anxious anticipation the arrival of each issue.

I have written to add one element to that discussion, an element which, I believe, distinguishes the Presbyterian from the Continental tradition.

As I understood your exposition, you see the denomination as a federation of congregations, who voluntarily cede a portion of their spiritual authority to regional and denominational assemblies. I take this to imply that the local congregation can also revoke that authority.

In contrast, you correctly reject the evils of episcopal government (authority coming down from an individual), and congregationalism (the sovereignty of the local congregation in isolation from those in other places). Dr. Lester DeKoster has bought into that American heresy of individualism: "just me and my Bible."

Bible-believing Reformed Christians reject both episcopal monarchianism and Baptist egalitarianism. Christ alone is head of the Church, and He has chosen certain men (neither a lone man, nor all men), through whom to rule His church.

In the local church, these men constitute the session/consistory. You talked about this level, but I think that this is the only level you would refer to as the church.

In the Presbyterian tradition we go beyond this. In the Form of Government of my own Orthodox Presbyterian Church (chapter XIV), we read, "A regional church consists of all the members of the local congregations and the ministers within a certain district The presbytery is the governing (body? — DJE) of a regional church." This use of "church" is based on such passages as Acts 9:31, "...the church throughout all Judea...." Note the singular.

And also the church in general is, indeed, the church. The Form of Government (chapter XV) says, "The whole church consists of all the members of its regional churches. The general assembly ... is the governing

body of the whole church...." References to the church universal abound in Scripture, e.g., Acts 12:5, I Corinthians 10:32, and Ephesians 5:23.

Government by elders in the local congregation is seen in Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5. For the church at large, we see the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15. The presbytery is less clearly evident, but can be seen by way of analogy to session and general assembly, and also in the references in I Timothy 4:14, and in the church at Antioch in Acts 13.

Thus, unlike our Continental brethren, Presbyterians see the presbytery and general assembly as integral to our understanding of the church. They do not function by delegated or voluntary authority, but by divine authority, under the headship of Christ and the discipline of His Word.

My belief is that God gave great wisdom to the men of the Westminster Assembly and the Synod of Dordt, and it is only at great peril that Dr. DeKoster removes those ancient landmarks. □

Christopher S. Cole
Charlotte, NC

Officebearers' Conference

Mr. Ron Koole

Mr. Koole is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.

Doon Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa was the site of the spring officebearers' conference. This conference was held on March 3, 1992, one day prior to the meeting of Classis West. The conference was attended by more than 65 men, which number included: pastor and elder

delegates to the Classis, professors and students from Mid-America Reformed Seminary, and men from our Protestant Reformed churches in this area.

As in the past, the conference dealt with a particular subject. The subject for this conference was "The



Chairman, Rev. Ron Hanko

church order of Dordt." The history and the value of this "minor" confession was the subject of the keynote address presented by Rev. R. Cammenga. The rest of the conference was conducted in sectional format in which two presentations were given at each of three scheduled sectional times. The content of these presentations is the copy for this issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

Attending an officebearers' conference was a first for me. It was an opportunity that proved to be a very valuable experience. Because the material presented has a direct bearing on the work done by officebearers, such a conference provides opportunity to grow in the office. The lively,

hour-long discussions following each presentation cannot be captured in print, but they did serve well to enrich the topics. Also, one cannot help but be struck by the important place that God ("who is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in the churches of the saints" [I Cor. 14:33]) has given to the church order in the Reformed churches. This church order, which has its principle roots in the Reformation, enables the churches to heed the command of Scripture to do all things decently and in order. A conference of this nature serves as a stimulus to officebearers to read and study carefully the articles of the church order.

One final observation by this writer has to do with the attitudes that the officebearers at a Reformed conference such as this display toward the work God has given them to do. One could not help but be impressed by the deep sense of responsibility these men felt to preserve and uphold the demands of the Scriptures with respect to Reformed church polity for the good of the churches. Even though there may not be complete agreement on every point of interpretation, there is nevertheless always a unity of goal and purpose. The words of Psalter # 371 take on deeper meaning: "Behold how pleasant and how

good that we, one Lord confessing, together dwell in brotherhood, our unity expressing."

The conference committee is planning a future conference, D.V., in conjunction with the meeting of the September Classis in Loveland, Colorado. The topic will be "Pastoring the Flock." I look forward to this conference with eager anticipation. Surely those who attended the Doon conference would say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psalm 16:6). □



Elder Ron Koole, Rev. Carl Haak

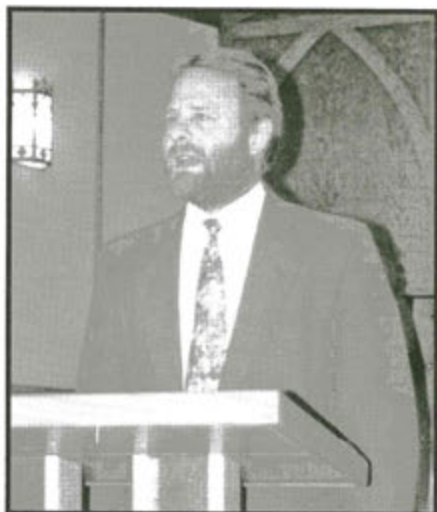
The Value of the Church Order Today

Rev. Ronald Cammenga

Article 32 of the *Belgic Confession of Faith* reads in part:

In the meantime we believe that it is useful and beneficial, that those, who are rulers of the Church, institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church; yet they ought studiously to take care, that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord, and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God.

Rev. Cammenga is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado.



Rev. Ronald Cammenga

This article explains the rationale behind our Reformed church order. Our church order articulates the fundamental principles which Christ, the only Master of the church, has instituted for the government of the church. Based on those fundamental biblical principles, the church order also sets down certain ordinances established by the rulers of the church for maintaining the body of the church. These are ordinances deemed "useful and beneficial," both for the local congregation and for the broader fellowship of churches. These are ordinances that "tend to nourish and preserve concord and unity." And these are ordinances which serve the better "to keep all men in obedience to God."

What is a good Reformed church order? A good Reformed church order is NOT a detailed set of regulations, attempting to spell out proper procedure in any given situation. A Reformed church order is not a "How To..." manual for ecclesiastical mechanics, or a playbook for clerical athletes. A Reformed church order is not a fixed, rigid system of rules, dos and don'ts imposed upon the churches. Any study of our church order will reveal the amazing amount of flexibility in procedures and practices possible within the perimeters set down by the church order. The main purpose of the church order is NOT to settle arguments over fine points of church polity raised in

consistory meetings or on the floor of the broader assemblies. To approach the church order this way is a mistake; worse, it is destructive of its main purpose: "to nourish and preserve concord and unity" in the church.

What is a good Reformed church order? A good Reformed church order aims to show how the Lord Jesus Christ rules His church and wills that His church be ruled. It summarizes what the apostles have spoken and written regarding church government, church office, and church discipline, applying all this to present circumstances.

Based on these criteria, our church order, which is basically the church order adopted by the Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619, is a good Reformed church order. It sets forth the fundamental principles of church government contained in the Word of God, as well as those ordinances which, although they are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, are based upon biblical principles and serve the good order and unity of the church. For nearly 400 years the church order has proved its usefulness in the life of Reformed churches the world over.

To a great extent the explanation for the loss of concord and unity in Reformed churches today is disdain for that which has been instituted to preserve that concord and unity, the Reformed church order.

We are convinced that the church order continues to be of use and value to Reformed churches today. We are not in the company of those Reformed churches, some of long standing, others lately sprung up, who deliberately decline adoption of the church order. We are not in sympathy with those in Reformed churches formally governed by the church order who

publicly advocate repeal of the church order and whose view of the church order is that it is a dry bone that serves no useful purpose in the modern church. We are not in agreement with those promoting revision of the church order, but revision that will compromise fundamental biblical principles and cut the heart out of the church order.

We are convinced that if the Reformed church is to be Reformed and ever reforming, she must continue to adhere to the Reformed church order, or, in cases where she has departed from it, return to it. To a great extent the explanation for the loss of concord and unity in Reformed churches today is disdain for that which has been instituted to preserve that concord and unity, the Reformed church order.

Value of the Church Order

The first value of the church order is that it serves to maintain good order in the churches. Repeatedly the apostolic command given in I Corinthians 14:40, "Let all things be done decently and in order," was included in the early Reformed church orders. Our church order refers to it also. The words "good order," found in several articles, are derived from the apostle's expression. The first article of our church order justifies the "matters the following articles treat" on the ground of "the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ."

In I Corinthians 14:33 the apostle Paul states that "...God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." It is ONLY after he has said this that he finishes the chapter by saying, "Let all things be done decently and in order," (vs. 40). God wills that there be peace in the church; He is the Author of peace. For the sake of this God-approved peace, in order that there will be peace in the church, good order must be maintained in her midst. That is the first and outstanding value of the church order.

Secondly, and closely connected to this, the value of the church order

is that it preserves the unity of the church. From the very beginning the fathers insisted that the Reformed churches ought to be united not only in doctrine, but also in polity. The church order is an important basis for church unity; is itself an expression of church unity; and is a means to safeguard the unity of the churches bound by its regulations.

How we ought to value anything that serves, in the language of the Belgic Confession, "to nourish and preserve concord and unity"! The churches' unity depends on the pure preaching of the Word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the faithful exercise of Christian discipline. It is the value of the church order that it establishes those regulations in the life of the church that assure that the pure preaching is maintained, the sacraments are properly administered, and discipline is faithfully exercised.

In the third place, the church order has confessional value. The church order serves as a "minor confession" in the church. The "major confessions" of our churches are "The Three Forms of Unity": *The Heidelberg Catechism*, *The Belgic Confession of Faith*, and *The Canons of Dordt*. But our churches also have "minor confessions." These would be especially our adopted liturgical forms, as for example "The Baptism Form," "The Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper," "The Form of Ordination of Ministers of God's Word." To be included as a "minor confession" is also our church order.

The church order is the confession of our churches concerning what we believe to be the Scriptural principles of church government. The church order sets forth fundamental biblical truths concerning such things as: authority in the church of Jesus Christ; the nature and duties of the special offices; the sacraments; and Christian discipline.

In the fourth place, the value of our church order is that it connects us to the church of the past. The Reformed church is NOT independent.

It is not independent church politically. But it is not independent either in the sense that it stands isolated from the church of the past.

The Reformed church stands connected with the church of the past, and the church order is one means to maintain this connection. Through the church order the church has access to the wisdom of the church of the past and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church of the past. It would be both foolish and wrong to ignore that guidance as though the church of ages past was not Spirit-filled and Spirit-led.

Fifth, the value of the church order is that it serves a regulative purpose. The church order contains the various provisions according to which the local congregation, as well as the broader assemblies, classis and synod, are governed. How the church is to be governed is set forth in the Word of God. However, Scripture is not a ready-made church order or manual of church government. Instead, the Scriptures set forth the fundamental principles upon which the government of the church is based. The church order seeks to enunciate and apply these principles in the actual government of the church.

And sixth, the value of the church order is that it serves a juridical purpose in the church. This means that, in connection with the Word of God

and the "Three Forms of Unity," the church order has a place in settling disputes and deciding issues in the church. The church order is not the final arbiter of truth and practice. The final arbiter is the Word of God. But inasmuch as the church order sets forth the principles of Holy Scripture and applies these principles to the life and government of the church, the church order has authority in the Reformed church and the Reformed fellowship of churches.

*All who desire to become
or to remain members
of the church
must willingly consent
to be governed
by the church order.*

In addition, the church order is also authoritative because of the willing consent of the churches themselves. The churches have mutually agreed to bind themselves by the authority of the church order. All who desire to become or to remain members of the church must willingly consent to be governed by the church order. Thus, the binding authority of the church order is the authority we willingly consent to give it. □

... to be continued



Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. Dale Kuiper

The Authority of Broader Ecclesiastical Assemblies

Rev. Ronald VanOverloop

The subject assigned is that of the authority of the broader assemblies. It is the position of the author of this paper that the church order of Dordt clearly established not only the fact of broader ecclesiastical assemblies, but also the authority of these broader assemblies, which authority both is given to the broader assemblies by the local congregations and is always to be recognized by the local churches.

The church order of Dordt was a product of the Reformation. It shows how the Reformers established a church polity which walks, as it were, a balance beam. On the one side of the beam are the evils of hierarchy; on the other side are perils of independence. The balance beam on which the Reformers walked is wide enough for the two feet on which Reformed church polity stands. One foot is the autonomous nature of the local congregation. The other foot is the authority of the ecclesiastical assemblies which arises out of federative relationships. The Reformers held these two essential principles together, feeling the tension, but not letting them conflict. Just as a person cannot walk or run with only one foot on a balance beam, so can the Reformed church order of Dordt not be read without seeing both of these principles side by side. The church order

does not know one without the other.

An understanding of the authority of the broader assemblies is gained through a proper understanding of the place of the broader ecclesiastical assemblies and especially of the federative relationships out of which the broader assemblies arise. What does the church order and what do the Scriptures have to say about these relationships and their assemblies?

Observe that the church order calls for the presence of the broader assemblies (classis and synod) as much as it calls for the presence of the consistory. And observe that it does not make the presence of the broader assemblies a matter of choice. They "shall be"!

Why was this so? Why did the Reformers establish federative relationships? The churches of the Reformation recognized the fact of federative relationships and the authority of their broader assemblies because they believed this to be historical and biblical.

J.L. Schaver, in his *The Polity of the Churches*, maintains that the churches in apostolic times, although lacking visible organization, nevertheless were united by the persons, preaching, and work of the apostles. In addition, he maintains that the "early unity in the Church was made manifest by the interest that one part of the Church had in the activities of the other parts," citing as examples the interest the church at Jerusalem had in the conversions in Samaria and Antioch, and the collection taken in

all the churches for the church at Jerusalem. Schaver believes that "these several manifestations of the unity of the apostolic churches were anticipations of the ecclesiastical councils which later gave expression to the unity of the primitive Church" (Vol. 1, pp. 79, 80). Schaver states that "the most pronounced anticipation of major assemblies in apostolic days was the council of Jerusalem,..." the decisions of which "were made applicable to the several churches of Syria and Asia Minor." "The decisions were not merely advisory, as adherents of independent polity claim, but were at the time considered to be binding in character" (p. 81). The Scriptures describe the conclusions reached by the meeting in Jerusalem as resulting from the leading of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28); as "decrees" ("dogmata," Acts 16:4); as binding on all the Christian churches of that time; and as having the result that the churches were blessed and grew (Acts 16:5).

A study of the history of the early church after the apostles also yields evidence of provincial assemblies. And later there were the renowned ecumenical councils of Nicea, Constantinople, Chalcedon, etc.

The Reformers also maintained the practice of broader assemblies, for they established, as soon as it was possible, federative relationships within their countries and with other Reformed bodies in other countries. This acceptance of federations and broader assemblies is surprising, for it took place at a time in the history of

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Elk Grove Village, Illinois.

the church when the Reformers were responding to the evils in the Church of Rome, many of which arose directly out of its hierarchical church polity. Instead of reacting to Rome's hierarchy with independentism (as the radical Reformers were doing and whose lead it would have been so easy to follow), the Reformers consistently called for federative relationships and for the assemblies which have been instituted for the proper functioning of these relationships. The first record of a broader assembly during the Reformational era was the Synod of the Reformed Churches of France in 1559. The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands have been meeting in broader assemblies regularly ever since 1563. The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands initially held their broader assemblies across the border in Germany because of persecution, but hold them they did.

Therefore, the church order of Dordt in Article 29 accurately reflects the thought of early church history and of the Reformation when it mandates the presence of ecclesiastical assemblies including "the classis, (the particular synod), and the general synod."

*Entrance into a
federative relationship
may be said to be voluntary,
but no less so, demanded.*

The recognition of the federative relationships (and broader assemblies) arises out of the important biblical principle of the unity of the church of Christ. The spiritual unity of Christ's body must come to institutional manifestation. This is certainly accomplished in the local congregation; but it is not fulfilled there, for no single local manifestation of the true church exhausts the unity of Christ's body. By federative relationships the individual congregations show the unity of Christ's church to the world, and this manifestation of the unity of

the church is unto the glory of Christ her Head.

Although churches are autonomous (relatively, for they are dependent upon Christ their Head), they may not stand alongside each other in a disconnected and unconcerned manner. Entrance into a federative relationship may be said to be voluntary, but no less so, demanded.

The federative relationship is voluntary because a local congregation, which manifests the three marks of the pure church, is a complete manifestation of the body of Christ, and is not a sub-division of a large super-church. Therefore, the local church *freely* joins herself to a denomination of churches. There is no earthly authority, not even a denomination, which may or can force a federative relationship upon a local church.

However, the federative relationship is not strictly voluntary and a matter of choice. It is demanded because the local congregation is not equal to THE church; it is not the whole of the body of Christ. It is demanded in the divine call to seek the unity of Christ's body and to exercise the communion of saints. It is demanded by the fact that each member of the body of Christ has life not only in relationship to the Head, but also in relationship to the other members. Thus each local church has the calling to manifest the oneness of the body of Christ. When the Dutch Reformed churches met at Emden in 1571 the stated purpose was "in order to institute the unity of the churches in outward form."

A denomination is a union of autonomous churches, which do not surrender their autonomy by membership in the federation. "Reformed Church polity therefore upholds the integrity of the local Church, but at the same time does full justice to all the Churches federally united and the spiritual unity underlying the federation.... There is a very definite spiritual obligation flowering forth from a real spiritual union and agreement which makes ecclesiastical federation and its implications mandatory upon

the Churches" (VanDellen and Monsma, *op cit.*, p. 133).

In the federative relationships the local church cooperates with others in the Lord's work, doing together what it cannot do alone, or doing better what no one church can do as well on its own.

What is the nature of the authority of the broader assemblies in Reformed thinking?

It is ecclesiastical authority. The authority of the broader assemblies is derived from the local churches, as they delegate men with authority to the broader assemblies. Because the authority of the broader assembly is the authority of the local church as designated for that purpose, there is not a fundamental difference. The difference is not in the nature of the authority, but in the areas in which the authority is exercised. The church order delineates the different areas in which the assemblies (consistory, classis, and synod) exercise their authority. The church order correctly reflects Scripture when it gives only to the consistory the authority to preach, administer the sacraments, and exercise Christian discipline. However, the consistory may not independently change and revise the church order or one of the confessions, for this latter belongs to the broader assemblies. The church order assigns to the broader assemblies activities such as the examination of men for the ministry of the Word, the approval of the call, the dismissal, the emeritation, and the deposition of ministers, the institution of a congregation, church visitation, the work of missions, etc.

VanDellen and Monsma inform us that at the very first Synod of the Reformed Churches of the Low Countries the delegates were delegated with authority to act for the sake of the general welfare of the churches; but at the same time rules were made which protected the rights of the individual members of the churches, and which would counteract all wilfulness and arbitrariness (p. 132). On this same matter Schaver states, "The autonomy of the local church has its

limitations because of the agreement into which it enters with other churches to consider certain matters together and to abide by the combined judgment of the affiliated churches. The local church bestows upon the major assembly a part of its authority so that through the combined authority of all the churches the local church may be governed the better. And the judgments of the major assembly with respect to the matters of mutual interest or of mutual agreement the local church must of course respect" (*op. cit.*, p. 97).

That Article 30 of the church order purposefully uses the terms "major" and "minor" is in order to avoid any concept of a system of lower and higher courts, as if the consistory is lower and has a more limited degree of authority while the synod is higher and has the most extensive degree of authority. The use of the terms "major" and "minor" indicates that the authority of the broader assemblies is the same in essence as the authority vested in the local church. "Major assemblies do not have power or authority that is distinctly different from the power that resides in the local church." "Their power or authority does not reside in themselves but is delegated to them by the local churches. These through their delegates bring their united power or authority together in the major assembly, and its authority is greater because it is the united authority of the local churches" (Schaver, *op. cit.*, p. 96).

That the broader assemblies have authority is indicated in Article 36 of the church order which uses the word "jurisdiction." VanDellen and Monsma correctly believe that the original Latin word *auctoritas* could have better been translated "authority," but with the caution that "the Church Order refers to a moral and spiritual authority," not "in a legalistic, compelling sense" (*op. cit.*, p. 160). The nature of this authority is not judicial, but moral and spiritual.

The fact of authority in the broader assemblies of federations is also clear in Article 31 which states

that the decisions of major assemblies are to be "considered settled and binding." Anything that is "settled" should not continue to be the subject of discussion, which would raise discord in the body of Christ. "Binding" indicates that all the churches are obligated to live up to the decisions of the assemblies concerned. "This provision is indeed a jewel of great value. It is ... indispensable for Reformed church government" (*op. cit.*, p. 145).

Later VanDellen and Monsma state that "whatever is decided by majority vote becomes settled and binding for all, not against the will of the minority, but by their common

"Let us not forget that denomination also-operation would be out of the question if classical and synodical gatherings were not vested with the authority attributed to them in Article 36."

consent. Minorities conform themselves voluntarily to the officially expressed opinion of the majority, for the sake of good order and the welfare of the Churches concerned. And let it be said, the minorities at our ecclesiastical assemblies are duty bound to do so. For note that every Church has voluntarily joined itself to the federation of Churches forming one denomination. Together they have agreed to cooperate, upon the basis of the Church Order, which Church Order presupposes and even expresses co-operation on the part of all the

Churches regarding all decisions which agree with the Word of God and the Church Order in force" (*op. cit.*, pp. 144, 145). "Let us not forget that denominational co-operation would be out of the question if classical and synodical gatherings were not vested with the authority attributed to them in Article 36. Ecclesiastical federation according to the Reformed conception simply implies authoritative rights on the part of the major assemblies over minor assemblies." The nature of the ecclesiastical federation is such that the "major assemblies exercise a binding authority regarding all matters which concern the Churches in general and which have not been specifically left to the individual Churches or congregations" (*op. cit.*, p. 161).

The church order presents us with a beautiful balance. The balance beam is broad enough for the Reformed church to stand on both feet: the autonomy of the local congregation and the delegated authority of the federative relationship and its broader assemblies. This balance has been tried and it has proven to be true. To lean too far in either direction, to take one of these feet off the balance beam, can prove to be dangerous. May God give to the church today the wisdom to walk this balance as calmly as the church order of Dordt directs us.

(The extensive use of quotations from recognized authorities of Reformed church polity is to show that the presentation of the authority of the broader ecclesiastical assemblies in this paper is not just that of its author, but that of the historical Reformed churches.) □



Sectional

The Questions of Article 41

Rev. Russell Dykstra

Article 41 of the church order of Dordrecht sets forth some practical rules for good order in classical meetings. Recognizing, however, that the main function of classical meetings ought to be spiritual in nature, the Reformed fathers included the following in this article:

...Furthermore, the president shall, among other things, put the following questions to the delegates of each church:

1. Are the consistory meetings held in your church?
2. Is church discipline exercised?
3. Are the poor and the Christian schools cared for?
4. Do you need the judgment and help of the classis for the proper government of your church?

These questions of Article 41 are the focus of our attention. A thorough examination and discussion of these questions has merit for the Reformed church today because they touch on vital principles in Reformed church government. These questions have to do with the Reformed principle of the unity of the church of Christ on the earth, in general, and of the unity of congregations in a denomination, in particular. They also touch on the principle of corporate responsibility and the necessity of mutual supervision within a denomination. Thus these questions are especially significant in light of the spirit of independence both in our culture and in the Reformed church world. It is contrary to our rebellious natures

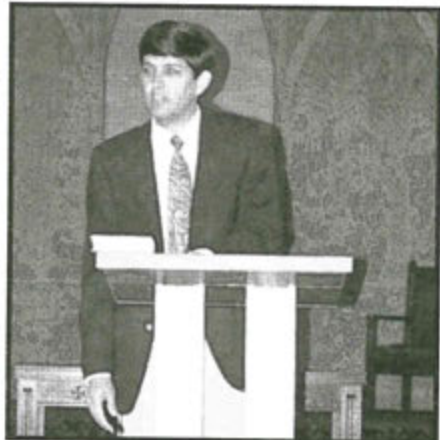
to submit ourselves to the supervision of peers. And to admit the need for help is difficult for most individuals, and even more so consistories. Some might argue that today the need no longer exists for these questions to be answered at classical meetings — that church visitation (being much more complete) has made them largely irrelevant, and that the practice has become an empty formality in most Reformed classes. While there is some truth to this, we nevertheless hope to demonstrate that the questions of Article 41 remain valuable for a classis meeting, for the unity and the spiritual well-being of the churches. But it is also evident to most observers that the manner in which these questions are asked and answered could stand some improvement. This can be done simply by the classes returning to the original intent and practice of Article 41.

To understand the validity and value of the questions of Article 41, let us briefly examine the principles which underlie them. First of all, remember that one of the basic principles of the Reformed church order is the autonomy of the local congregation. Christ rules His church, and does so through the office of elder. No one overrules the consistory, overturns its decisions, or takes over the government and/or work of the consistory. The question must be faced, do these questions of Article 41, which require mutual supervision, violate the autonomy of the local congregation? The answer is "No." To see that mutual supervision does not violate the principle, notice that elders are also called to a mutual supervision of each other's life, doc-

trine, and work. Not only that, but elders are called to oversee the work of the deacons — without taking over the work of the deacons! No doubt the danger exists of a consistory (or consistories) lording it over another consistory, just as the danger exists that one elder lords over another. But that is a violation (forbidden by the church order), not a right use of, mutual supervision. Properly executed, therefore, these questions do not violate the autonomy of the local congregation.

One of the main principles behind Article 41 is the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. We confess the oneness of the church. Our Lord's prayer in John 17 reveals this as one of the purposes of His life and crucifixion ("that they may be one"). We are admonished "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). This unity comes into expression in congregations joining together to form a denomination (the church order assumes that, too).

But the unity of the church of Christ is a unity in Christ, which is to



Rev. Russell Dykstra

Rev. Dykstra is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa.

say, in the truth. Striving for this, Reformed churches require subscription to common creeds [the Three Forms of Unity(!)], and require faithful preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism.

In addition to this doctrinal unity, certain, agreed upon, biblical standards must be required for life in each congregation, beginning with the work of the officebearers. That is the purpose of the questions in Article 41. They set forth some minimum requirements for faithful labors of the officebearers. This is an effort to insure unity among the congregations within certain biblical limits.

The other principle assumed in these questions is that of corporate responsibility. Corporate responsibility results from the fact that God deals with man in his (man's) relationships. That we are born guilty and worthy of hell is due to the fact that God deals with us as part of the human race, descendants of Adam, and thus God imputes Adam's guilt to us all. There is a legal responsibility connected with being in a certain body, or, "corporation."

With respect to the church, corporate responsibility means, on the one hand, that each member is responsible for all the decisions of the congregation, classis, and synod, in which he is a member. On the other hand, it means that each congregation is responsible (accountable) for what happens in a sister congregation. The Bible clearly teaches this in the matter of Achan, whose guilt was imputed to the whole nation of Israel, even when only a handful of Israelites even *knew* about his sin (Joshua 7). Another illustration is the prayer of Daniel for the sins of all Israel. Although Daniel personally had not committed many of the horrible sins enumerated, he described it as "my confession" (Daniel 9). The reality of this responsibility demands mutual supervision. That is the purpose of Article 41's questions.

Notice, however, that the purpose of these questions is not negative, i.e., to escape corporate guilt, but positive, viz., the spiritual well-being

of each congregation and its members. This becomes evident from an examination of the history of Article 41 in the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands. The Synod of Emden, 1571, established some of the first rules for classical meetings. The first two articles were:

- 1) In the classical meetings one of the ministers shall deliver a sermon which the other ministers gathered together shall judge, and if there is something to improve, they shall let it be known. All the others shall do the same, each in his turn, in following classical meetings.
- 2) After this the president shall be chosen by the general vote of the ministers and after he has offered prayer, he shall ask each one individually whether they hold consistory meetings in their churches. Whether church discipline is maintained [in them]. Whether they have any struggle with any heretics. Whether they have any doubt concerning any articles of doctrine. Whether the poor and the schools are cared for. Whether they need the advice and help of the other ministers for ruling the churches, and other such things.

The Synod of Middelburg, 1581, adopted a church order which included the following on classical meetings:

Art. 30 ...Further, the president among other things shall ask each one whether consistory meetings are held in their churches; whether church discipline is exercised; whether the poor and schools are provided for; finally, whether there is anything for which they need the judgment and help of classis for the proper government of their church. The minister who was appointed by the previous classis shall deliver a short sermon from the Word of God, which the others shall evaluate and if it is lacking in anything they shall point this out.

The same was adopted by the Synod of Dordrecht, 1618-19, in Article 41, and is substantially what the PRC have in Article 41.

The emphasis of these articles is clearly the spiritual welfare of the congregation. The fathers were concerned about the preaching as well as the work of the elders and deacons—

for the spiritual good of the churches.

To finish the brief sketch of Article 41's history, it should be noted that the Christian Reformed Church has revised these questions at least four times—1930 (5 questions), 1942 (11 questions), 1947 (5 questions), and one additional time to its present form:

In order properly to assist the churches, the president, on behalf of classis, shall among other things present the following questions to the delegates of each church:

1. Are the council, consistory, and diaconate meetings regularly held according to the needs of the congregation?
2. Is church discipline faithfully exercised?
3. Are the needy adequately cared for?
4. Does the council diligently promote the cause of Christian education from elementary school through institutions of higher learning?
5. a. Have you submitted to the secretary of our Home Missions Board the names and addresses of all baptized and communicant members who have, since the last meeting of classis, moved to a place where no Christian Reformed churches are found?
b. Have you informed other councils or pastors about members who reside, even temporarily, in the vicinity of their church?
c. Have you, having been informed yourself of such members in your own area, done all in your power to serve them with the ministry of your church?
6. Does the council diligently engage in and promote the work of evangelism in its community?

(Note: These questions are answered on the credentials and reviewed by a committee who reports any irregularity to classis.)

Having noted the underlying principles of the questions of Article 41, let us briefly examine the meaning and importance of the individual questions.

1. Are the consistory meetings held in your church?

Certainly the question assumes that *regular* consistory meetings are held, a minimum of one per month,

and more often for larger churches. Good order in the congregation, and thus its spiritual welfare, demand that consistories meet regularly, and often enough to take care of the congregation's needs.

2. Is church discipline exercised?

This question is not simply whether the consistory has any cases of discipline at that time. Rather, as Rev. G. VandenBerg explains it, "the idea is whether the consistory observes that all things, doctrine and life, are maintained in the church in harmony with the Word of God. Does the church faithfully punish evil doers with the spiritual power of the keys of heaven's kingdom? The preaching of the Word is itself a chief means of discipline and, therefore,

this question may also well imply an inquiry into whether or not the Word is so preached that its discipline is felt in the congregation" (*Standard Bearer*, Vol. 36, p. 117).

The importance of faithful Christian discipline is obvious. It is one of the marks of the true church (Belgic Confession, Art. 29), is necessary because the church of Christ must exhibit holiness and maintain purity in doctrine, and is required out of love for the erring member. Failure to exercise Christian discipline will destroy the congregation.

3. Are the poor and Christian schools cared for?

The question could better be divided, since care of the poor and care

for Christian schools are two different matters, and a church might well be faithful in one and not in the other.

The care of the poor relates directly to the work of the deacons. The purpose is to determine whether or not Christ's office of high priest functions in the church so that His mercy is concretely experienced through it. At the least, it inquires concerning diligent collecting and distribution of the alms. Are the deacons faithful to their ordination vows?

Since the care of Christian schools is covered in another sectional, we will not discuss this part of the question.

The fourth question will be treated, the Lord willing, in a second article on Article 41. □

Mutual Censure — Article 81 of the Church Order

Rev. Wayne Bekkering

The mutual supervision and the mutual censure of all the officebearers is a necessary and desirable thing. If it is lacking, some serious consequences will result. The first danger is that nothing will be done with respect to the question of faithfulness in carrying out the duties of the offices. This is the natural direction of things and this is the general trend that we see in the church world today. We as Protestant Reformed Churches are not immune to laxity in this area, and therefore need to be on our guard. The second danger that may come from a failure to exercise proper mutual censure in our consistories is that

one man or a very few may dominate. This may be done consciously or unconsciously, but when the responsibility for supervision and censure is not firmly held to be the right and duty of every consistory member (elder, deacon, and minister), then bad patterns may develop. A general rule of life is that if we do not supervise ourselves, someone else will supervise us. Hierarchy will fill the void if we do not take hold of our responsibility to exercise mutual censure according to Article 81 of the church order.

Before the Reformation, the church of Christ was under a faulty system of church government: the hierarchical system. The Roman Catholic Church has the hierarchical system of government. The Pope is the highest authority, and the author-

ity to supervise passes down through the ranks. The archbishop supervises the bishops, the bishops supervise the priests, the priests supervise the deacons, etc.

The Reformed churches, following the Scriptures, became Presbyterian in church government, i.e., they were ruled by elders. In Presbyterian church government the officebearers are equal in authority as they function in the local church, and supervision is mutual (see Art. 17 of the C.O.).

Calvin was the first to introduce mutual censure. He did so, already in 1544, among the officebearers in the church in Geneva, according to Rutgers in his *Kerkelyke Adviezen*. Mutual censure was later (1568, Wezel) adopted in some of the Reformed churches in the Lowlands under the influence of a' Lasco. In

Rev. Bekkering is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa.

1578 the Synod meeting in Dordt made mutual censure a practice of all the Reformed churches in the Lowlands. The Synod in 1578 added to the provision for mutual censure these stipulations: first, that it be conducted before the Lord's Supper; secondly, that it have a view to the doctrine and walk of the officebearers.

The 1578 version of our Article 81 probably proved to be too heavy in its implications to be readily used in the churches. Its connection to the Lord's Supper seems to imply censure in a more formal sense. The Synod of s' Gravenhage in 1586 made some fundamental changes in the article. It dropped the phrase "before the celebration of the Lord's Supper," and it omitted the words "doctrine and walk" and substituted the words found in our present version: "with regard to the discharge of their office." These changes seem to have lifted some of the heavy implications of formal censure, because no other changes were made in the article in the Reformed churches in The Netherlands.

It seems to the present writer that Article 81, as we have it today, still suffers from that "heaviness" that the Synod of 1586 attempted to lift. For example, we still use the term *censura morum*, which is the Latin translation, not properly of our version, but of the version before 1586, which spoke of censure of doctrine and walk. *Censura morum* implies censure, not so much of the discharge

of office, as of moral behavior or conduct of the officebearer. Our present Article 81 speaks of Christian censure or mutual censure, not censure of morals. We ought to stop using the term *censura morum*, and use "mutual censure" or "Christian censure" as Article 81 expresses.

Another factor that may tend to make Article 81 in our 1914 version of the church order "heavy" is the reintroduction of the phrase "before the celebration of the Lord's Supper," which was dropped in 1586.

Prof. Hanko in his *Notes on the Church Order* says, "It is clear, however, from this history that *Censura Morum* is not intended to be a censure of conduct in relation to the celebration of the Lord's Supper."

*Officebearers
in Christ's service
must show that they have
the mind of Christ in them
by humbling themselves
before each other....*

The reference to the Lord's Supper probably was intended to insure the use of mutual censure at regular intervals by the consistories. W.W.J. VanOene, in his "practical guide to the use of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches," entitled, *With Common Consent*, says concerning this point, "There was regularity the few years during which the Christian censure had to be held before each celebration of the holy supper. Later on this regularity was often missing, although many consistories continued the custom of having it at the last meeting before this celebration."

No doubt we need to have the regular intervals specified lest we lose the practice altogether. We can keep the phrase "before the celebration of the Lord's Supper" as long as we understand that it refers to regular intervals, and not to the question of whether or not officebearers can go to

the Lord's Supper together. VanDellen and Monsma, in their *Church Order Commentary*, in treating Article 81, say, "the mistaken conception just noted is quite general."

This attempt to expose some misconceptions concerning mutual censure must not be taken as an attempt so to "lighten" mutual censure as to render it useless.

The main purpose of mutual censure, clearly, is to be able to admonish one another in a friendly spirit with regard to the discharge of the respective offices. Under the best of circumstances that is always difficult. Whenever one's performance in his office is examined, many different human reactions come into play. Fear, doubt, defensiveness, feeling of inadequacy, and anger may arise within one. Why is this true? The answer is sinful human pride. Every officebearer knows that he is not perfect and that he can improve the discharge of his office, yet the prospect of having someone else point that out is painful to his pride.

Officebearers in Christ's service must show that they have the mind of Christ in them by humbling themselves before each other, and by being servants to God's people.

Joh. Jansen nicely captures the spirit of mutual censure in his *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* as he comments on Article 81. The following is this writer's translation of Jansen. "The purpose of Christian censure is not to be disagreeable by bringing all sorts of picky things, or to argue about personal opinions. But to sharpen each other, and to spur each other to greater diligence in the discharge of their offices for the welfare of the church, and to God's honor. Every officebearer must remember that he not only has the right and responsibility, in a loving way, to bring his criticism of his fellow officebearer's performance, but also has the right and responsibility to receive the legitimate criticism of his fellow officebearers, brought in a loving way, concerning his performance. Only in this way will the holy purpose of mutual censure be a blessing." □



Rev. Wayne Bekkering

Consistorial Promotion of Christian Schools

Rev. Arie denHartog

"The consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents have their children instructed according to the demands of the covenant"

Article 21 of the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches

From the time of the Reformation, Reformed churches have been convinced of the urgency of promoting good Christian schools for the instruction of the covenant youth of the church. Faith in the truth of God's covenant, according to which God gathers His church in the line of continued generations, convinced the earliest leaders of the Reformed churches of the great benefit such Christian schools serve for the future welfare of the church and the strength of her members. She was convinced that the church, even as institute, has a calling and obligation to promote such Christian schools. This conviction is expressed in Article 21 of the church order. The original form of this article had its birth already in the late 1500s. This conviction is further emphasized by one of the questions of Article 41 of the church order, in which each Consistory at classis meetings is asked whether "the poor and Christian Schools are cared for."

Article 21 as adopted by the great Synod of Dordt had a somewhat dif-

ferent form than the present article does. At that time it read, "Everywhere Consistories shall see to it, that there are good schoolmasters who shall not only instruct the children in reading, writing, languages and liberal arts, but likewise in godliness and in the Catechism." The reason for this particular formulation had to do with the fact that at that time free parental Christian schools were not yet known. The state and the church were considered to be related in the matter of the education of children. The government of Holland was largely committed to the Reformed faith, and it promoted this faith also in the schools. The government used the Reformed churches to establish and promote and supervise its schools. The church could greatly influence the instruction given at the schools through the appointment and support of good school teachers. The church also gave catechism instruction in the schools.

Article 21 in its present form was first adopted by the Synod of Roseland in 1914. The change in the wording of this article is in accord with a recognition of the proper separation of church and state. It was carefully formulated to avoid the suggestion that the church as institute should involve itself in the actual establishing and governing of schools. Reformed churches do not support the idea of a church-run school. This is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, which makes the education of children the first responsibility of the parents. Secondly, the Reformed church does not believe that the in-

struction of children in reading, writing, math, sciences, the arts, etc. properly belongs to the calling which the Lord has given to the institute church. She must not entangle herself in these kinds of matters because her sole calling is to preach the Word, and thereby also to instruct and build up the youth of the church to take their place as full members of the church in their later life. Catechetical instruction properly belongs to the ministry of the church. Preparing children and young people for their secular occupation in life does not belong to the task which the Lord has given to the church. This is the responsibility of parents. The Reformed Christian school is therefore a parental school, established by a society of parents and governed by this society.

There are however several reasons why the church must be greatly interested in promoting good Christian schools. Article 21 suggests that parents should consider the matter of good Christian schools as implied in the "demands of the covenant." When we bring our children to be baptized we promise that we intend to "see



Rev. Arie denHartog

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

these children, when come to years of discretion (whereof you are either parent or witness), instructed and brought up in the aforesaid doctrine, or help or cause them to be instructed therein, to the utmost of your power" (Form for Infant Baptism). The church has the calling to see to it that parents fulfill their covenantal obligation and keep the vows they made at the time of the baptism of their children.

Furthermore it is absolutely fundamental to the Reformed faith to understand that "all of life is religious." Our religion is not something isolated to our worship of God on the Lord's Day or to our involvement in the life of the church. The Reformed Christian must live his whole life, by the grace of God, from a Christian perspective, applying the principles of the Word of God to every area of life and living according to the doctrines taught by the church. When parents instruct their children they must inculcate this. This is very important. This must be one of the chief motives for Christian parents to establish Reformed Christian schools.

If at all possible we want to have our children instructed in schools where the instruction is permeated with biblical principles and perspectives. Not only that, we want the instruction to be distinctively Reformed, if at all possible. When we in our baptism vows promise to instruct our children in the "aforesaid doctrine" this doctrine is the doctrine of the Reformed faith as believed and preached and taught in our churches. Our doctrine will greatly influence the whole of our perspective on life. This is of course true because doctrine and life go together. Our doctrine will determine the perspective of instruction in our parental schools. The church is greatly interested in there being good schools where instruction is given that is in harmony with the Reformed doctrine taught in the church. The ideal that we must strive for is the so-called "triple alliance" in which church, home, and school are all laboring together for the glory of God, for the spiritual welfare of the children of God's covenant,

and for the promotion and defense of the Reformed faith which we love and which we believe to be in every point based on God's Word. As a church we are greatly interested in having the youth of the covenant instructed also in the day school in such a way that their instruction helps to prepare them for their role as church members and for their calling as Reformed Christians in the midst of the world and in the kingdom of Christ.

The consistory, including the ministers, elders, and deacons, promote good Christian schools in several specific ways. First of all, of course, the minister of the Word is obligated by this article of the church order to emphasize the great importance of good Christian schools regularly in his preaching. He must by the power of the Word of God exhort Christian parents wherever possible to band together to establish good

*Consistories must labor
towards unity of purpose
among God's people
and to impress upon parents
the urgency of
their covenant calling.*

Christian schools. He must strongly exhort parents to send their children to such schools. The minister who regards Article 21 of the church order encourages existing Christian schools by frequently praying for them and for the teachers in these schools as he leads the congregation in prayer. The consistory fulfills this obligation by mentioning this matter on family visitation. The consistory must admonish parents who do not use good Christian schools when they are available. The consistory fulfills the demands of this article by encouraging serious Christian young people to consider teaching in a Christian school as a high and worthy occupation in the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Consistories promote Christian schools by encouraging giving for the

financial support of such schools. These schools are becoming increasingly expensive to operate. In many cases, especially the larger families have great difficulty in paying tuition bills. It is certainly proper that regular offerings for Christian schools be collected in the worship services. This is certainly a worthy cause. It is good to encourage those who are not parents to contribute also regularly to Christian schools — especially those who are grandparents. The latter is in harmony with what Psalm 78 states about the concern we should have, not only for our children, but even for our children's children in the covenant of God.

The seriousness of the calling of consistories which Article 21 requires can hardly be overemphasized. Ours is a day of increasing ungodliness. This ungodliness is promoted by the wicked, humanistically oriented, ungodly schools of our land. It is certainly dangerous to send covenant children to such schools. These schools in their philosophy and perspective of education are under the dominion of the evil one. They are mighty instruments of the devil to influence the youth of the world and to seek to lead astray the members of the church of Christ.

It is not always possible in every case, because of various circumstances, for parents to establish a Christian school. Nevertheless, striving for this ideal certainly belongs to our calling to instruct our children in a godly way "to the utmost of our power." Maintaining good Christian schools is becoming increasingly difficult and expensive. Doing this requires great sacrifices on the part of parents. It is contrary to the sinful nature of all of us to want to make such great sacrifices. The history of the establishing of our own Protestant Reformed Schools has been one which always involved great struggle. Opposition to our own schools has been great. Sometimes this opposition has come even from the members of our own churches. Consistories must labor towards unity of purpose among God's people and to impress

upon parents the urgency of their covenant calling.

In connection with Article 21 several questions have often arisen. The question has been asked: "Are parents who oppose Christian education for their children and refuse to send their children to available good Christian schools the proper object of church discipline?" As is the case with all questions of discipline, this must be carefully answered. Reformed churches are always careful about discipline. On the one hand, there may be legitimate special circumstances according to which parents decide not to send their children to a Christian school. There is an area where this whole matter must be left up to the conscience of God's people as parents. As long as it is evident that such parents are seriously striving to the utmost of their power to nurture and admonish their children in the fear of the Lord they are of course not to be disciplined. However, carnal reasons for opposition to Christian schools may not be tolerated in the church. And there are of course many carnal reasons for being opposed to Christian schools. Parents who are evidently negligent in fulfilling the demands of the covenant and are careless about the instruction of their children are proper objects of church discipline.

It has also been asked in the past whether men who are opposed to Christian schools ought to be nominated for the special offices in the Reformed church. One who is openly opposed to Christian education obviously could not submit to Article 21 of the church order and ought not to be nominated.

Another question that has arisen often in our own churches in connection with Article 21 is whether this article implies the necessity of establishing our own Protestant Reformed Christian schools wherever possible rather than just using already existing Christian schools in the community. In harmony with what has been said about promising to instruct our children in the "aforesaid doctrine," Article 21 does imply this. Again, it is

not always possible everywhere for parents to establish our own Protestant Reformed schools. God in His providence rules over the circumstances which make this possible or not. Furthermore, when parents are diligent in fulfilling their covenant calling with respect to their children in areas where there are no Protestant Reformed schools, they can be confident that the Lord will preserve their children according to His will.

*As the church-world becomes
more and more apostate
in doctrine
this is also reflected
in the schools.*

Already early in the history of our churches this whole question was debated. It was seen at that time already, for example, that the error of "common grace" had very serious implications for the instruction given in many of the existing Christian schools. It was recognized that this error in the philosophy of education and in the life-style promoted in those Christian schools was no minor, insignificant matter. This error was in large part the basis for a philosophy of education which borrows much from humanistic and worldly, supposedly great leaders in the philosophy of education, and seriously compromises the calling of Christians to live antithetically in every area of their life. History has proven that this

error has had serious consequences for the direction in which many of these schools have gone.

When today we look at existing Christian schools in most communities, we see them being far from ideal as "good Christian schools." Many of them are overrun with humanistic philosophy and even promote teachings such as the ungodly theory of evolution, feminism, laxity towards morality, and worldly entertainment among the youth. As the church-world becomes more and more apostate in doctrine this is also reflected in the schools. This of course is to be expected; it could not be otherwise. As time goes on there is increasing urgency on the part of the parents of our churches to labor to "the utmost of their power" to establish Protestant Reformed Christian Schools. Article 21 of the church order obligates consistories to do all within their calling to encourage and promote Protestant Reformed Christian Schools.

Let me conclude with a personal note. For the first time in the history of our family, since we have come to Redlands to be pastor of the church we have the great privilege and blessing to send our children to one of our own schools. As a pastor I witness the tremendous blessing this school has been for our children and I can see the great impact it has had on the life and strength of the church. I for one am deeply grateful to those who have gone before and endured the struggles, suffered the hardships, and made the great sacrifices necessary to establish this Christian school. □



Separate Meetings of Elders and Deacons

Rev. Richard Moore

My sectional is intended to deal with the practical and spiritual implications of having separate meetings of elders and deacons. My contention is that if a congregation grows to a size such that the number of officebearers makes it possible to have separate meetings of the elders and deacons, then it is profitable to do this. It is profitable for the work of both the elders and the deacons, and thus also for the congregation. We will attempt to draw attention to some of these points of profit during the course of this paper. We will attempt also to set up certain guidelines for the division of labor when a Council decides to hold separate meetings for the elders and deacons.

There is a definite distinction made in the Scripture and in the church order of our churches between the consistory and the deacons. The articles of the church order that speak of the Consistory make reference to the ministers and the elders, and this in distinction from the body of deacons. We refer especially to Articles 4, 5, 10, and others that speak of the Consistory and make this distinction. In the church order, Article 37, there is however provision made for deacons to be included in the Consistory. But this article also makes clear that the rule is that there is to be a distinction made between the Consistory and the deacons, with the ministers of the

Word and the elders forming the Consistory. We quote part of the article: "In all Churches there shall be a Consistory composed of the Ministers of the Word and the Elders, who at least in larger congregations, shall, as a rule, meet once a week."

This has been the distinction made by the churches since 1574 at a synod of Dordt. But also there is the exception of this distinction made when the Consistory is small. Notes: "Whenever the number of the Elders is small, the Deacons may be added to the Consistory by local regulation; this shall invariably be the rule where the number is less than three." The last part of this statement, that "this shall invariably be the rule," was added in 1914 as a matter of safety and sanctified wisdom. Because God providentially has kept our congregations limited in terms of membership, and because the preaching of the pure gospel of Christ is not attractive to the mass of people, the exception has almost become the rule in our denomination. For the majority of our congregations, the deacons have been added to the number of the elders to serve in Consistory. In many cases this remains necessary because of size limitation. However, when it is possible, and, I believe, especially when the number of elders is more than four, it would be beneficial for our churches to have separate meetings of the Consistory and deacons. I believe we should strive for this.

The reason for this separation of labors is simple: to the Consistory and to the deacons God through His Son has given distinctive labors in the

church of Christ. To the consistory has been given the rule of the church and the calling to take the oversight of the preaching of the Word, the labors of the officebearers, and the life of the congregation. Thus they are to exercise the royal office of the Lord. To the deacons has been given the calling to be busy with the labors of mercy in the church of Christ, and thus to exercise the priestly office of Christ. While all the officebearers together manifest the threefold office of Christ, Christ has made this distinction in the exercise of His office in the church on earth. The church order sets this truth forth in the separate articles on the offices of minister, of elder, and of deacon. Further, we understand that the labors of the Consistory and of the deacons require lengthy and diligent work to perform rightly these duties, which can be accomplished much more efficiently and carefully in separate meetings that concentrate on the work that is peculiar to the respective offices.

With this said we must add that when a Consistory is still small and



Rev. Richard Moore

Rev. Moore is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa.

the deacons are added to the Consistory, the deacons must be included in all the decisions of the Consistory. They give advice and vote on all matters of the Consistory. This includes the matters of spiritual concerns within the congregation, and upon matters of Christian discipline as well. In effect, while they are added to the Consistory, the deacons also in these decisions are acting elders. The converse is also true, the elders together with the deacons make decisions concerning the work of the office of mercy. To do otherwise would be contrary to the church order.

Let us consider now how the labor of a Council is to be divided and carried out when there is sufficient size to warrant separate meetings of the Consistory and deacons. In this connection let us understand that the church order in several articles teaches us that the ministers, elders, and deacons are to meet regularly and monthly, at the very least. The various articles of the church order mention meeting even weekly; and, if the work warrants, this may be necessary in a very large church. However, practically, the work of the church can usually be handled properly in our churches by holding regular monthly meetings, and making provision for special meetings to consider pressing matters that ought not to wait for the next regular meeting, whether that be by the Consistory, Diaconate, or Council.

Therefore each month the Council, the Consistory, and the Diaconate are to meet in separate meetings to accomplish the work of the church. How then is the work of the church to be divided? In the first place, we must hold that the basic division of work is determined by the peculiar offices in which the officebearers labor. The following is a suggested division of labors.

The deacons will handle all work of benevolence. This includes the scheduling of visits to the widows and orphans, and the aged or infirm, as well as the consideration of the affairs of the congregation that might

suggest a need within the congregation for their labor of mercy. There is, further, the necessary consideration of the needy causes that are worthy of the labors of the deacons to collect alms and distribute them for these causes. Included is all other labor that belongs specifically to the work belonging to their office in harmony with Articles 25 and 26 of the church order. Also, for practical reasons, although this does not belong specifically to their labor as deacons, all financial matters including general, building funds, etc., are often given into the care of the deacons. And the financial reports are presented at the Council meetings.

The elders take the oversight of the congregation: exercise discipline, make provision for and report on family visits, make catechism class visits, visits to the aged, and take oversight of the deacons and of the preaching of the Word. They are to make decisions on the representation to the broader assemblies. Further, they take oversight of confessions of faith, baptism requests, transfers of membership. They take oversight of the minister, and all other spiritual matters of the congregation, including that labor that is given to them or implied in the church order, Articles 16, 21, and 23.

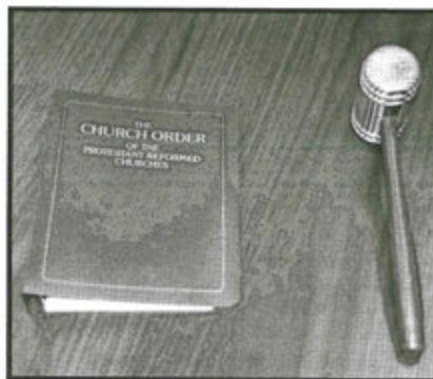
The Council is composed of both the elders and deacons. At the Council meetings the deacons will present a written report of their work, and the elders will report to the deacons on their labor as it affects the labors of the diaconate. The Council will handle the work of evangelism, the general fund budget, the buildings and property, nominations for office, the calling of the minister, any discipline necessary of any officebearer, the agenda for congregation meetings, the approbation of the congregation meetings, etc. — in short, all matters not concerning benevolence or the exercise of Christian discipline within the congregation and the spiritual oversight of the same. We must also include here the annual church visits. Also, we have found it helpful to have a committee of one elder and one

deacon to welcome new members to our congregation. Finally, *censura morum* shall be conducted in harmony with Article 81 of the church order at the Council Meeting.

There shall be minute books kept by each body, the clerk of Consistory acting also as the clerk of the Council. The deacons shall choose their own officers, including President, Secretary, and General Adjunct. There shall be an elder or minister present at the deacon meetings. This is in harmony with the oversight that the Consistory is to take over the labors of the deacons.

In conclusion, it should be obvious from all the various labors required of the officebearers that the labors of the officebearers will be much better served from such a division of labors whenever this is possible. Our Lord Jesus Christ gives to the officebearers a very serious responsibility in caring for the souls of His people, and it is necessary that we undertake the same in the most orderly and spiritually edifying way possible. Even the apostles found that they could not do justice to the labor of the spiritual feeding of the flock of Christ and the spiritual oversight of the same, and also properly carry out the mercies of Christ in the church. Graciously our Lord instituted the office of deacon to care for these needs. Surely we also should see that it is the part of sanctified wisdom to accomplish our labors in the several offices by the means afforded us in separate meetings where our time can be devoted to the calling of our offices in the best possible way.

□



News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Ministerial Trios and Calls

The congregation of the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, Canada has extended a call to Candidate M. Dick to serve as their next pastor.

Last year's Synod appointed the Hope PRC of Walker, MI as the calling church for a minister-on-loan to the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore (ERCS). This pastor will have the status of associate pastor of Hope Church, and he will also be under the supervision and discipline of Hope Church. You may also be interested to note that the original term of service calls for a period of three years. This is subject to renewal for periods of two years with the consent of the pastor concerned, and at the discretion of Hope Church to whom the request of the ERCS will be directed.

The ERCS asked for a minister-on-loan to help them fill a need for assistance in doing mission work in Singapore itself as well as the possibility of doing work in other countries. There is also a need in dealing with various problems that have arisen within the Singapore churches, as well as a need for assistance in doing preparatory work for seminary instruction.

Now that Rev. J. Kortering and his wife have returned from Singapore, having completed a short-term supply to the churches there, Hope has begun, in earnest, to call a pastor-on-loan. Hope's Council presented a trio to their congregation, consisting of the Revs. M. Kamps, J. Kortering, and G. VanBaren; and at a congregational meeting following Hope's Prayer Day service on March 11, Hope extended a call to Rev. J. Kortering.

Since Rev. Kortering is now con-

sidering three calls (one to continue to serve as pastor of the Grandville, MI PRC; one from the Hudsonville, MI PRC to serve as a missionary to Larne, Northern Ireland; and one to service in Singapore), he sent a letter asking for an extension to consider Hudsonville's call. The Lord willing, he will answer these calls on April 12 — which means that many of our readers will know the answer Rev. Kortering gives before this "News" even comes out.

Young People's Activities

Our March 15th installment of the "News" contained an item about the young people in our Faith PRC in Jenison, MI and their Apple Pie phone-a-thon fund-raising project. Well, let me start out by saying, What a Project! These young people sold 1,850 nine-inch apple pies. Of course, selling pies is one thing, making them is something else. On Saturday, March 14, the young people, with lots of help from their parents, as well as from Great Lakes Fundraisers Inc., met in the gym of Heritage Christian School. They started at 7:30 AM, and work continued until 4:00 PM, followed by a clean-up committee until around 7:30 at night.

You really had to see it to believe it. Heritage's gym was transformed into a pie factory.

Great Lakes Fundraisers provided everything from the Michigan Ida Red apples to the hair nets and gloves. There were machines that cored, peeled, and sliced up the apples. Then, in assembly-line fashion, the pies were made and boxed.

Without doubt, Faith did an excellent job. We probably haven't seen the last of this fundraiser. After all, I can attest to the fact that apple pies don't last forever.

Congregation Highlights

Prof. D. Engelsma traveled to Pella, IA on Friday, March 13, at the request of the Pella PRC to give a public lecture at the Central College Chapel, entitled, "Genesis 1-11: Myth or History?"

The congregation of the Southeast PRC of Grand Rapids, MI was invited to an open house of their newly renovated parsonage after their Prayer Day Service.

On Tuesday evening, February 25, the congregation of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI met for an hour of fellowship to welcome the Higgs and Laning families and to show support and appreciation for their seminary students. It appears from the bulletins of Hope that presently Hope has four of its members who are preparing for the gospel ministry.

Since Rev. C. Terpstra, pastor of the South Holland, IL PRC, was on a classical appointment to the Hope PRC of Isabel, SD over Prayer Day, the Council of the Peace PRC of Lansing, IL, South Holland's closest church neighbor, extended an invitation to South Holland's congregation to worship with them on that evening.

Address Changes

Rev. George Lubbers
Raybrook Manor, Rm. 111
2121 Raybrook S.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49546
telephone: (616) 285-8049

Pastor Jaikishin Mahtani
75 Jalan Hitam Manis
Singapore 1027
Republic of Singapore
telephone: 011-65-472-3441.

□

Report of Classis West

Classis West met on Wednesday, March 4, 1992, in Doon, Iowa. Classis met in three sessions and finished its business at about 7:30 Wednesday evening. Rev. D. Kuiper served as President of Classis and also bid farewell to Classis West, since he has accepted a call from Southeast PRC of Grand Rapids, in Classis East.

Most of the business conducted by Classis was routine. Classical appointments were scheduled for Hope PRC of Isabel, SD and for the Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta, Canada. An overture from Doon

PRC regarding the manner of indexing the classical archives was rejected by Classis. Eight subsidy requests totaling \$165,692.00 were approved for 1993 and will be forwarded to Synod, 1992 for its approval.

Various elections were also conducted. Rev. R. Moore was re-appointed to the Classical Committee; Rev. S. Key was elected as delegate *ad examina*; and Revs. R. VanOverloop and R. Moore as Church Visitors. The ministers chosen as delegates to Synod, 1992 were Revs. W. Bekkering,

R. Cammenga, C. Haak, and R. VanOverloop. Elder delegates chosen were Messrs. R. Bruinsma, A. Brummel, K. DeJong, and C. Van Meeteren.

Classis also decided the dates and meeting places for the next two meetings of Classis. The next two meetings of Classis West are scheduled for September 2, 1992 in Loveland, Colorado, and March 3, 1993 in South Holland, Illinois.

Rev. R. Hanko
Stated Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Christian Fellowship Society of the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church expresses its heartfelt and sincere sympathy to their members, Tom and Vicky and Greg and Vicki VanOverloop and their families in the death of their dear sister-in-law,
LINDA VANOVERLOOP.

May the family find comfort in the words of our Lord in John 14:2, 3, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

Pete Miedema, President
Judy Wigger, Secretary

NOTICE!!!

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 13, 1992 at the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

NOTICE!!

LECTURE TO BE HELD

April 30, 1992

at

First Protestant Reformed Church
2800 Michigan N.E.
Grand Rapids, MI 49506

Time: 8 PM

Theme: Office of All Believers

Speaker: Rev. Meindert Joostens
who will address the topic
"Power and Responsibilities
of the Pew"

Tapes will be available from the
above address.