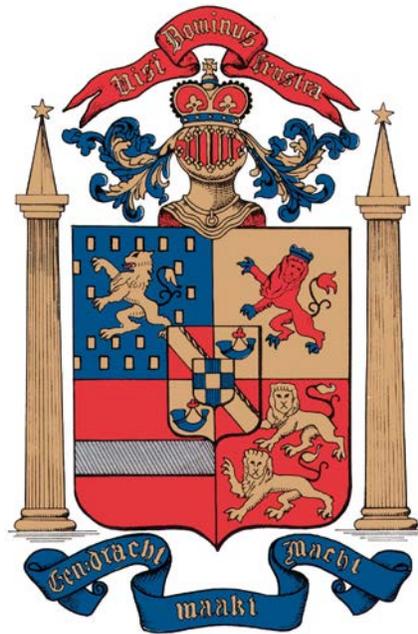


# RCA General Synod 2016 Proposed Constitutional Changes



FAQs regarding the proposed changes to the *Book of Church Order and Liturgy*

Presented by  
the Regional Synod of Albany

Officers: Rev. Nancy Ryan, President  
Rev. Kent McHeard, Vice President

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# Introduction

The 210<sup>th</sup> General Synod of the Reformed Church in America proposed several changes to the *Government, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship*.

Pursuant to the *Rules and Amendments of The Government of the Reformed Church in America and Disciplinary Procedures, Sec. 2* –

*Amendments to the Government, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, the Formularies, and the Liturgy and the Directory for Worship shall be made only upon adoption by the General Synod at a stated meeting, with recommendation to the classes for approval. At least two-thirds of the classes shall approve a proposed amendment in order to secure its adoption. If an amendment is approved by the classes, the General Synod, at its discretion, may pass a final declarative resolution on the amendment. When the declarative action has taken place, the amendment shall become effective.*

Given the number of proposed changes, the Regional Synod of Albany, in consultation with its officers, has prepared this guidebook to help ensure that members and delegates to classes are informed of the changes.

Please note that the recommendation numbers listed may differ than what was included in the 2016 General Synod Workbook. This is due to editing after Synod is over. For the sake of convenience, both the revised recommendation numbers and the original recommendation numbers are listed.

This guidebook is NOT a guide on HOW to vote, nor will it offer recommendations on how to vote. The guidebook will not offer a particular “position” on so-called “hot-button issues,” but will address various “frequently-asked-questions” (FAQs) of our officers, and will be presented in that format.

In addition to the seven changes proposed to the Government and Judicial Procedures, there are three ADDITIONAL changes that were proposed to chapter 3 of the *Book of Church Order* – the Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod, which are not a part of the Constitution of the RCA and thus do not need classis ratification.

Pursuant to BCO 3.I.11 –

*The Bylaws and Special Rules of Order of the General Synod may be amended at any stated meeting of the synod by vote of a majority of all the members present, provided that due notice of the proposed amendment has been submitted in writing at a previous stated session and has received the approval of a majority at that session. An amendment to the Bylaws and Special Rules of*

*Order shall go into effect upon announcement by the president of the Synod of favorable action under this provision.*

These changes are included in the guide as the Regional Synod felt it pertinent to inform readers of the changes that are taking place. These changes are listed in a separate section at the end of the guidebook.

Any questions regarding the content of this guide may be directed to the Regional Synod of Albany contact form on the Regional Synod website. Questions will be directed to the officers and those able to answer questions.

This guidebook may be shared with other classes and regional synods, in its entirety, with acknowledgement given to the Regional Synod of Albany.

# Adoption of “Order for Christian Marriage” as part of the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America (MGS 2016, R 16-14 [originally R 16-43], p. 84; 87-102)

“To adopt the ‘Order for Christian Marriage’ that was approved and commended for use in the church by the 2002 General Synod (MGS 2002, pp. 181-192) for recommendation to the classes for approval as part of the Liturgy of the Reformed Church in America.”

*\*Note: view the liturgy here- <http://images.rca.org/docs/worship/marriage.pdf>*

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## WHO PROPOSED THIS?

- The “Group of Five” (ADDENDUM TO THE RCA SPECIAL COUNCIL REPORT FROM THE “GROUP OF FIVE”)
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## WHAT TO NOTE:

- This is one of several recommendations brought by the “Group of Five” in response to the “Special Council on Human Sexuality” convened in April, 2016.
  - An additional recommendation was brought that would have recommended a marriage liturgy that used the phrase “two persons”.
  - Both marriage liturgies were recommended to General Synod 2016, with the all-synod advisory committee encouraging a vote of “yes”
  - The idea was that this would guarantee a decision by General Synod 2017.
- 

## FAQs

**Q:** *Currently, what liturgies are constitutional?*

**A:** *Multiple versions of the Order for the Lord’s Day, the Preparatory Service, The Order for the Sacrament for the Lord’s Supper, Orders for Baptism, Order for the Profession of Faith, The Ordination and Installation of Elders and Deacons, The Order for Christian Discipline, The Order for*

**Ordination to the Office of Minister of Word and Sacrament, plus the entire Directory for Worship.<sup>1</sup>**

**Q:** *So this liturgy gets placed in the Constitution. What does that mean?*

**A:** *According to Formulary #3 (more commonly known as “The Declaration for Ministers of Word and Sacrament), ministers promise to “conduct the work of the church in an orderly way and in accordance with the Liturgy...”. If in the eyes of the classis, a minister does not conduct the work of the church in accordance with the Liturgy, they could be open to charges.*

**Q:** *So, is the use of this liturgy mandated?*

**A:** *It could be argued both ways, and ultimately depends on how the classis would interpret the section of Formulary #3. The mandatory use of the “Order of the Lord’s Day” and sacramental liturgies is provided for by the BCO. There is currently no BCO section that mandates that this SPECIFIC liturgy be used (if passed), but it could be argued that failure to do breaks the vow made in Formulary #3.*

**Q:** *How does mandating this liturgy impact how I would officiate weddings, in general?*

**A:** *This is where things get tricky. Because the proposed liturgy does not have any room for things like “unity candles”, the type of service an RCA minister is allowed to officiate becomes incredibly restrictive. Ministers would need to follow this liturgy exactly, or be open to the same charges as someone who would officiate a same-sex marriage.*

**Q:** *No “unity candles”?!*

**A:** *Yes. This needs to be stated CLEARLY. If this liturgy is adopted as constitutional, it means:*

- **NO unity candles**
- **NO couple-written vows**
- **NO requested Scriptures**
- **NO extemporaneous music**

**Any minister who goes “off-script” from the prescribed liturgy could be open to disciplinary charges.**

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<sup>1</sup> See [rca.org/liturgy](http://rca.org/liturgy) for a more complete list.

**Q:** Over a... candle...?

**A:** *Yes. Here is where things get complicated. If we mandate a marriage liturgy (either between a man/woman or between two persons), we severely limit a couple's ability to craft a wedding service that is meaningful to them. If we are serious about mandating a liturgy that states marriage is between a man and a woman, we need to be serious about all of the liturgy. If we allow flexibility on one part of the liturgy, it would create a double-standard between what is allowed to be ignored and what is mandated to be enforced.*

**Q:** *And to be clear, we would be running into the same problems had the General Synod voted yes on the "two-persons" marriage liturgy.*

**A:** *Yes. If the two-person liturgy was approved, the same limitations on order of service would exist. Things like unity-candles would still not be permitted within the liturgy.*

# Supervision of Candidates for Ministry who are Not Members of a Local Church

(MGS 2016, R 16-30 [originally R 16-28], pp. 157-158)

To adopt the following changes to the *Book of Church Order* Chapter 1, Part II, Article 11, for submission to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

## Article 11. Supervision of ~~Students of Theology~~ Candidates for Ministry

### Sec. 1. [NO CHANGES]

Sec. 2. A person who is not a confessing member of a congregation in the Reformed Church in America who desires to become a minister shall present to a classis a letter of recommendation from the ruling body of the church in which membership is held. The letter of recommendation shall contain at least the information required by the classis from an RCA consistory.

Sec. ~~2.3.~~ Upon the consistory's or ruling body's recommendation, the candidate shall appear in person before the classis or its committee for examination in order to be considered to be taken under care. The classis or its committee shall inquire into the applicant's character and behavior; physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and educational qualifications; and the motives which led the applicant to seek the ministry as a vocation. If the classis is satisfied by the examination, the applicant shall be received under its care and enrolled as a candidate for the ministry.

### Sec. ~~3.4.~~ [NO CHANGES]

Sec. ~~4.5.~~ The candidate shall be under the supervision of the classis while in seminary, but.

- a. Candidates who are members of an RCA congregation shall remain subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the board of elders of the church in which membership is held.
- b. Candidates who are not members of an RCA congregation shall be subject to the ecclesiastical discipline of the classis as well as to the church in which membership is held.
- c. The classis shall show a continuing sympathetic interest by appointing a committee for each candidate to guide the candidate's study program and practical training providing appropriate mentoring, direction, and support to each candidate under its care.
- d. The classis may evaluate and discontinue the enrollment of any candidate at any time.

**Sec. 5-6.** If the candidate's membership is transferred to an RCA church under the jurisdiction of another classis, enrollment shall likewise be transferred to that classis. However, upon completion of seminary training, the candidate shall be examined for licensure and ordination by the classis that received the candidate under care~~in which church membership was held upon entering seminary studies~~, unless in the judgment of said~~that~~ classis it is appropriate for examination for licensure and ordination to be administered by the classis in which the candidate is presently enrolled. The approval of both classes shall be required to permit the classis in which the candidate is enrolled to administer the examinations.

(Subsequent sections renumbered.)

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## **WHO PROPOSED THIS?**

- The Call, Care, and Standards Committee (GS 2016 WB, p. 106ff)
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## **WHAT TO NOTE:**

- This allows individuals to seek ordination to the office of Minister of Word and Sacrament without holding membership in a Reformed Church in America congregation.
  - A letter from the non-RCA congregation shall be required of the classis taking the individual under care.
  - Discipline of these candidates who do not hold membership in an RCA church shall be under the purview of the classis (as well as the non-RCA church)
- 

## **FAQs**

**Q:** *What was the discussion at General Synod 2016 that prompted this question?*

**A:** *A discussion was held about what to do with people who want to become a Minister in the RCA but live in areas where there are not RCA congregations to join. Additionally, there are students who choose to attend our seminaries who hold membership in non-RCA congregations and do not want to switch membership but nevertheless feel the call to ordained ministry in the RCA.*

**Q:** *Why would someone who seeks ordination in the RCA not want to join an RCA congregation?*

**A:** *Several reasons. It may be disruptive for a candidate's family to leave the non-RCA church where they are active members. Or, given the growing interest in seminary distance-learning programs, it's possible that although the candidate seeks ordination in the RCA, there are no RCA congregations within reasonable distance. The challenge may be whether to remain in a local, non-RCA faith community that's committed to the candidate's spiritual nurture, or to join an RCA congregation farther away, in which active involvement may be necessarily limited.*

**Q:** *What are some of the possible reasons why this could be problematic?*

**A:** *It is unclear what the qualifications are, if any, for someone to claim the non-RCA church membership clause. Could this be simply because an individual doesn't like the style of worship, minister, location, etc., of the RCA church in town? If membership in an RCA church is not a requirement, what are the ecclesiastical reasons as to why someone should hold RCA membership at all?*

**Q:** *"What about this section that says a classis may evaluate and discontinue the enrollment of any candidate at any time?"*

**A:** *In the renumbered Sec. 5d – there is no recourse listed for candidates who have their enrollment dismissed by the classis. A candidate is not a member of classis, and therefore does not have standing to bring a charge or complaint against classis/members of classis, regarding the action of dismissal. It also does not give reasons as to what can lead to this dismissal. If it is a matter of conduct, the BCO is clear that ecclesiastical discipline falls to the consistory (for candidates who hold membership in RCA churches).*

**Q:** *Who defines what "classis" means in this section, if this is between stated sessions of classis? Does this mean a small-group committee or the President alone could dismiss a candidate?*

**A:** *It all depends on the bylaws of the respective classes. Some classes allow an executive committee or other designated committee to act on the behalf of the classis. This would probably depend on the classis as to how this would be interpreted.*

**Q:** Can't a classis already dismiss a candidate?

**A:** *Yes, but this makes it more explicit, and the statement "a classis may evaluate and discontinue the enrollment of any candidate at any time" leads to some interesting possible scenarios. Could this be a way for a classis to dismiss all women candidates? What about candidates from ethnicities with practices different than that of traditional Dutch culture? Or for holding different opinions on worship? Infant baptism? Sexuality? Atonement? The reasons for dismissal are endless. While the classis already implicitly holds the power to dismiss, this raises the concern that the classis may have the power to dismiss over any reason.*

# Marriages Solemnized in a Church or Congregation

*(MGS 2016, R 16-32 [originally R 16-16], p. 164)*

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken out):

## Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2

Sec. 11. The consistory shall be guided by the following requirements in their provision of services of worship:

[subsections a-f remain unchanged]

g. The consistory or governing body shall assure that marriages solemnized in a church or congregation are between a man and a woman.

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## WHO PROPOSED THIS?

- The Commission on Church Order was directed by GS 2014 to incorporate a definition of marriage as between one man and one woman to report back to GS 2015.
- The Commission's work was postponed until GS 2016 as a result of the decision to hold the Special Council on Human Sexuality.
- The Commission's work came to GS 2016 and a substitute amendment was offered on the floor.
- This substitute was passed and henceforth referred to the Committee of Reference in consultation with the corresponding delegate from the Commission on Church Order, per BCO 3.II.3.2
- The version that was offered by the Committee of Reference is what was discussed and is now before the denomination.

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## WHAT TO NOTE:

- This section of the BCO applies to the responsibilities of the consistory in overseeing services of worship.
- It is somewhat unclear what the word "church" means here.

## FAQs

**Q:** *What is the context of this section of the BCO? What do you mean “guided by the following requirements?”*

**A:** *Let’s break it down:*

**Chapter 1 [The Government]**

**Part I [The Consistory]**

**Article 2 [Responsibilities of the Consistory]**

**Section 11 [The consistory shall be guided by the following requirements in their provision of services of worship:]**

*The other requirements here govern mandated use of the Liturgy, qualifications on how sacraments are to be administered, selection of hymns, explanations of the Heidelberg Catechism, and who may preach. These are the requirements the consistory shall be “guided by” when making provisions for services of worship. What “guided by” means is unclear. While these are requirements, it is clear that many RCA churches fail to use the Constitutional Liturgy surrounding the administration of the Sacraments. Therefore, it seems questionable whether “guided by” mandates EXACTLY how these requirements are to be exercised.*

**Q:** *Why does it say “consistory” AND “governing body”?*

**A:** *Specialized ministers and commissioned pastors not in a local church setting would not have direct oversight by a consistory. Adding “governing body” would permit the classis to have oversight over the officiant.*

**Q:** *I’ve heard some people say that this makes marriage a sacrament. Can you explain that?*

**A:** *This section of the Book of Church Order covers the reading of the Word, the Liturgy, the administration of the Sacraments, the explanation of the Standards, the selection of hymns, and who may preach. Including mandates on marriage in this section may seem to imply that marriage properly belongs in the same category as these categories which, historically, it has not. The RCA Standards recognize only two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.*

**Q:** *Whom does the consistory or governing body “assure?”*

**A:** *This is unclear. Since this section of the BCO specifically addresses the roles of the consistory, it remains to be seen what party or parties the consistory would assure. The consistory is amenable to the Classis (BCO 3,1,3,6), so possibly the consistory assures the classis? It also does not address ministers who are not serving a local congregation (i.e. specialized ministers, retired ministers) who have no relationship to a consistory. In that case, would the “governing body” refer to the classis itself? This would seem to create differences in who is responsible for these marriages.*

*Additionally, if it is the consistory/governing body’s job to “assure” – would violation of this be the responsibility of that body? Or of the minister who performed a marriage between people of the same gender? Or both?*

**Q:** *What are some hypothetical problems that could arise?*

**A:** *For instance, if a specialized minister were to preside at a wedding ceremony of a same-gender couple at a beach, in which neither person was a church member:*

- *Does the “assurance” apply to such a service?*
- *There is no consistory to be consulted. If the “governing body” refers to the classis – since the classis didn’t “assure” this wedding, is the CLASSIS actually the responsible party and the one who violated this section? Could an action be filed against the classis itself?*
- *What actually constitutes an “assurance?”*
- *While a religious service, if the individuals are not church members, was the “church” constituted at the time of the ceremony? If not, does this fall outside of this requirement?*

## Regional Synod Responsibilities

(MGS 2016, R 16-49 [originally R 16-27], p. 259)

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

### Chapter 1, Part III, Article 2, Section 3

The regional synod shall, after reasonable and timely consultation with all parties involved, form, combine, and or disband classes. ~~The regional synod, after reasonable and timely consultation with all parties involved, and may also~~ transfer churches from one classis to another within its bounds.

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## WHO PROPOSED THIS?

- The Commission on Church Order, as directed by GS 2015 (GS 2016 WB, p. 208ff)
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## WHAT TO NOTE:

- This proposed change emerged after a complaint taken by the Holland Classis against the Regional Synod of the Great Lakes, in which RSGL tried to transfer a church from Holland Classis into a new classis that the RS had formed.
- The General Synod's Commission on Judicial Business had dismissed the complaint of Holland Classis, due to the BCO's current language which states that the Regional Synod has the prerogative to transfer churches from one classis to another. However, it did note that clarifying language to the BCO would be helpful in the future.
- As it currently stands, the classis has the sole prerogative in allowing churches to leave the denomination. But the regional synod has the sole prerogative in determining which classis a church resides in. This seemed (to Holland Classis) to contradict the BCO's rubric that the classis has superintendence over the local church.

## FAQs

**Q:** *In the RCA, how does a congregation dispute a decision of the regional synod to split up a classis or move a church from one classis to another?*

**A:** *Ministers and Elder delegates do not have the authority to file complaints against the regional synod. That is an action that the classis as a whole would have to take.*

**Q:** *But what if the classis itself is dissolved by the regional synod? If the only body that can file a complaint against a regional synod's actions can unilaterally be dissolved by the regional synod, doesn't that give the regional synod unchecked authority?*

**A:** *This is indeed a concern that Holland Classis had. If the classis is suddenly disbanded by the regional synod, there exists no body to complain against that action, as the BCO is unclear about who the regional synod is amenable to in matters such as this.*

**Q:** *Why the word "parties"? General Synod 2016 debated changing that word to "classes" or "congregations".*

**A:** *The disbanding of a classis involves lots of people and parties. There are also legal issues to consider (incorporation of classes, who owns buildings, etc). By allowing the word "parties", it gives anyone who may be affected by such an action a voice to address their concerns. Therefore, the word "parties" is a legal term, which can help when it comes to the legal ramifications of dissolving or moving corporations or the like.*

**Q:** *What are the implications of this? The Regional Synod already has the power, why add this language?*

**A:** *This continues to hold the denomination in general, and the regional synod in particular, accountable to one another. It ensures that we continue to communicate and share concerns that might otherwise lead to something like that occurred in Holland.*

# **Appointment of Candidates to Churches without Installed Minister or Minister under Contract** (MGS 2016, R 16-50 [originally R 16-28], p. 262)

To adopt the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

## Chapter 1, Part II, Article 7

Sec. 7. The classis may appoint a candidate enrolled in the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process ~~theological student~~ to a church without an installed minister or minister under contract, to furnish the service for which the candidate student is qualified. Before the appointment is made, the candidate student must secure the approval of the appointment by the RCA seminary or the Reformed Church agent that supervises the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry process ~~the student attends.~~

Sec. 8. A consistory or governing body shall not enter into a contract with a minister, a licensed candidate, or a candidate for the Certificate of Fitness for Ministry student ~~except by approval of the classis.~~ Between sessions of classis the approval may be given by the president and the clerk of classis.

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## **WHO PROPOSED THIS?**

- The Commission on Church Order, requested by the MFCA (GS 2016 WB, p. 210ff)

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## **WHAT TO NOTE:**

- The current language in the BCO predates the existence of the Ministerial Formation Certification Agency (MFCA). As such, students enrolled at non-RCA seminaries but enrolled in the MFCA program were left in limbo – could a classis appoint a student of the MFCA? And if so, who would need to give approval?

## **FAQs**

*Q: How will this affect churches without ministers who are looking to appoint seminary students to fill pulpits without installed ministers?*

***A: If the student is at an RCA seminary, the process does not change at all. The classis may appoint the student, so long as the RCA seminary gives approval. The classis must approve the appointment (or the President and Clerk – between sessions) before the consistory enters such a contract (as is the case of Ministers entering into a contract with a church).***

***If the student attends a non-RCA seminary but is enrolled in the MFCA, this allows the same process to take place – it is clarifying language. It clarifies that the MFCA is the one to give approval.***

*Q: So we could still call students to fill empty pulpits?*

***A: Absolutely! This just clarifies the process.***

## Church Membership

(MGS 2016, R 16-52 [originally R 16-30], pp. 263-264)

To adopt the following amendment to the *Book of Church Order* for recommendation to the classes for approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

### Chapter 1, Part II, Article 10, Section 2

**Sec. 2. If the corporation or other legal entity through which a consistory functions is dissolved, as a part of such dissolution process the classis shall be satisfied that each and all of the following conditions have been fulfilled:**

- a. The sale, transfer, or other disposition of all physical properties of the church.
- b. The transfer of all financial assets to the classis, and the assumption by the classis of all financial liabilities of the church and of all organizations within it to the extent of the value of such assets.
- c. The presentation to the classis of all formal church records, and all other records and documents in its possession.
- d. The determination of the membership status of all persons affiliated with the church, followed by a determination of the process for transfer or other disposition of the memberships.

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### WHO PROPOSED THIS?

- The Commission on Church Order (GS 2016 WB, p. 211ff)

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### WHAT TO NOTE:

- This change was proposed by the *Commission on Church Order*, most likely regarding an inquiry of what happens to members when a church is disbanded by the classis.

- This prevents membership status from being in “limbo”.
    - In 2015, the General Synod heard the appeal from a case in which two individuals’ memberships appeared to have “vanished”, when the church they were a part of was subsumed by another. The church they were subsumed by requested a certificate of transfer from the members of the subsumed church, but these two individuals were not given one. But once the churches had combined, the membership of these two individuals appeared to vanish, with the classis admitting as such.
  - This requires any church that is being disbanded to have presented a plan in which membership transfer is handled and who will hold the memberships of the members of the disbanded church.
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## FAQs

**Q:** *Our church is possibly going to disband. What exactly will we have to present to the classis?*

**A:** *This change is left vague, in order to address any sort of circumstance that could arise. Perhaps the church is disbanding because it simply has so few members left, and those members aren’t looking to join new churches. Or perhaps the church is being subsumed by another church; is membership in the subsuming church automatic?*

**Q:** *So who is responsible for crafting such a plan? It seems to imply the consistory but...*

**A:** *It’s a good question, and one that probably won’t be addressed until this is actually tested. It would seem that the consistory would have some determination (because they are the body granting certificates of transfer, and consistories handle membership), but if the classis is the body that actually formally dissolves the church. So what happens if the classis is “satisfied” with a membership plan that the consistory/members of the dissolving congregation are not happy with?*

**Q:** *So, if we’re disbanding, how to we make sure we have a result everyone is happy with?*

**A:** *Make sure you are talking with your classis executives and members of your congregation to make sure all voices are being heard. Good communication on this will be essential to ensure a smooth transition.*

**Appendix, Formulary No. 5, and Related  
Constitutional Provisions Applicable to  
Consistories and Classes**

*(MGS 2016, R 16-53 [originally R 16-31], pp. 264-266)*

To approve the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for submission to the 2017 General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

**Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7**

A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract unless (a) regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held, ~~or~~ (b) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory be exempt from this requirement, or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

AND

**Chapter 1, Part II, Article 15, Section 3**

**Sec. 3.** The classis shall be responsible for the pastoral care of each enrolled minister and the minister's immediate family. Pastoral care shall be exercised by such means as the classis deems appropriate, which shall be reported to the classis annually in order to assess its adequacy and effectiveness. The classis shall assure that the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance are fulfilled for all of its ministers serving in congregations or employed by an assembly, institution, or agency of the Reformed Church in America under call or contract, unless (a) regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held, or (b) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church or other assembly, institution, or agency part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory or employing assembly, institution, or agency be exempt from this requirement, or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

AND

## Appendix, Formulary No. 5, Paragraph 5

We promise you in the name of this church all proper attention, love, and obedience in the Lord. We promise and oblige ourselves to encourage you in the discharge of the duties of your important office, and to free you from worldly avocation while you are dispensing spiritual blessings to us, to pay you the sum of \$\_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ payments yearly and every year, and to consider annually whether such payments are adequate, as long as you continue to be the minister of the church, together with (here insert particulars which refer to a parsonage or residence, or other emoluments). As long as you continue to be the minister of this church, we also promise to pay the stipulated contributions to the Reformed Church retirement plan ~~and the premiums for provide benefits including group life insurance, and long-term disability insurance, and the cost of group medical insurance for you as stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services if group medical insurance is elected. If not electing to offer a group medical insurance plan, we promise to reimburse you the cost of the premiums paid for medical insurance for you and your immediate family.\*~~ Such medical insurance coverages shall meet or exceed the minimum standards stipulated by the Board of Benefits Services. ~~The foregoing shall not apply where~~ If you and your immediate family elect medical coverage through your spouse's employer-sponsored group plan, we will not be required to provide medical insurance. In addition we promise to provide a minimum of one week and a stipend equal to not less than the equivalent of 1/52 of the minimum cash salary established by the classis for a study program mutually agreed upon by you and us for your professional development, for each year in service with our congregation. By mutual agreement this time and money may be accumulated to a maximum equivalent of four years of service. We hereby bind ourselves and our successors for the performance of all the foregoing by the underwritten signatures of the consistory members to this instrument.

*\*"Immediate family" is understood to mean those dependents eligible for family medical insurance according to the insurance plan document of the Reformed Benefits Association.*

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## WHO PROPOSED THIS?

- The Commission on Church Order, in conjunction with the executive director of the Board of Benefit Services (GS 2016 WB, p. 212ff)

## WHAT TO NOTE:

- There are two reasons that these changes are being made. (From: 2016 BCO workbook, p. 212)
    1. to properly align requirements of the Book of Church Order regarding certain insurance benefits (including long-term disability and group life) with that which is in fact available from third-party insurers
    2. to revise Formulary 5 regarding reimbursement of premiums paid by ministers for medical insurance when the minister's employer does not offer a group medical insurance plan.
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## FAQs

**Q:** *Bottom line, how will this affect my benefits?*

**A:** *That's a complicated question! According to the changes proposed in [Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7],*

- *"Part-time" status is now to be determined by standards set by BOBS (classis still determines if the consistory is exempt)*
- *If the minister is serving LESS than "part-time" (as defined by BOBS), no provisions are to be required.*

**So, if you are in a church and working less than part-time, you could lose your benefits, or not be eligible for them if you start working for another church.**

**Q:** *What is "part-time" status according to BOBS?*

**A:** *After speaking with the executive director of benefit services, it was determined that BOBS has not come to a conclusive definition of the term "part-time". However, the information given was that this most likely would mean a minimum of 20 hr/week. It was unclear how multiple positions less than 20 hr/week would be calculated (i.e. a minister who works two 10hr/week positions – unsure if that would meet the requirement).*

**Q:** *But I signed the call form (Formulary #5) many years ago, and now my consistory wants to change my benefits?!*

**A:** *The change documented in 1.I.2.7 gives the provisions when the consistory is not obligated to follow the requirements of Formulary #5. If you don't fit into those categories, the consistory has no standing to change your benefits.*

**Q:** *So this really just affects new ministers who will sign this updated version of Formulary #5?*

**A:** **Correct. Some of the changes include:**

- ***Promising to “provide benefits” as opposed to “pay the premiums of”***
  - ***This eliminates the idea of “reimbursements”***
- ***Clarifies that if insurance is elected through a spouse’s plan, the consistory is not required to provide services.***

**Additional Proposed Changes to the *Book of Church Order* that do not require classis approval.**

**\*\*Please note that these are listed under their ORIGINAL recommendation number.\*\***

# R 16-29: Calculating Membership for General Synod Council (GSC)

To approve the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for submission to the 2017 General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined; deletions are stricken):

## Chapter 3, Part I, Article 3

### Sec. 2. Composition

a. One-half of the membership of the General Synod Council (GSC) shall be elders and one-half shall be ministers and no fewer ~~not less than one-third~~ of the membership shall be women. For purposes of the composition requirements of the preceding sentence, the vice-president, the nonvoting member from the ELCA, and the general secretary of the General Synod shall be excluded. The Commission on Nominations shall... [NO FURTHER CHANGES]

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## WHO PROPOSED THIS?

- The Commission on Church Order, as requested by the Commission on Nominations (GS 2016 WB, p. 211)

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## WHAT TO NOTE:

- This change came to the General Synod from the *Commission on Nominations*. The Commission was concerned about how the membership composition would be calculated when certain positions of GSC are not based on nominations enlisted by the Commission. Therefore, this change means that membership is only calculated based on nominations that the Commission actually has control over nominating.

## R 16-53: Regional Synod Executive shall be Corresponding Delegate to Synod

To approve the following amendment to the Bylaws of the General Synod in the *Book of Church Order* for submission to the 2017 General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined):

Chapter 3, Part I, Article 9, Section 11

c. The regional synod executive shall be a corresponding delegate to the General Synod.

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### WHO PROPOSED THIS?

- The Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, responding to overtures from the regional synods of the Heartlands, Far West, Great Lakes, and New York (Report of the Advisory Committee on Overtures and New Business, p. 3ff)
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### WHAT TO NOTE:

- Currently, each classis is allowed a number of delegates proportional to its size, while the Regional Synod is allowed to “appoint a delegate to the General Synod” (1.III.7.3). This delegate may be a minister or an elder from the regional Synod (1.IV.1)
  - There is currently no provision to allow Classis executives/clerks/coordinators to attend General Synod
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### FAQs

**Q:** *What, by definition, is a “regional synod executive?”*

**A:** *This is not a term that is defined by the Book of Church Order. Some regional synods could choose this to be their stated clerk. Or, it could be interpreted to mean something else. Some regional synods have a relatively large staff, while others may only have volunteers. This change leaves things open to interpretation.*

*Q: Our regional synod staff person attends General Synod every year. How does this change things?*

***A: Currently, our regional synod staff person attends General Synod as a guest. She has no vote, no voice at the microphone and no seat at a table. This change will mean that she will have a voice and a seat, but she still will have no vote. Regional Synods will still have the ability to send a voting delegate (ours usually sends our elected president), as well as corresponding youth and women delegates.***

*Q: Do we have any precedent for this – allowing someone in place like this to be a corresponding delegate?*

***A: Yes and no. We permit the General Secretary (who functions as the Stated Clerk of the General Synod) to be a corresponding delegate (3.1.9.6). However, Stated Clerks of classes are NOT automatically considered corresponding delegates.***

*Q: The Regional Synod executive is a hired position. Should we have delegates to General Synod who are hired? That seems to go against our ecclesiology.*

***A: We do have corresponding delegates who are “hired” into their positions by way of agents of the General Synod (Presidents of RCA colleges, for instance). But it raises some interesting questions about what it means to be an employee of an assembly and automatically be delegated to General Synod.***

## **R 16-55: Permit GS President to appoint delegates to advisory committees**

“To approve the following amendments to the *Book of Church Order* for submission to the 2017 General Synod for final approval (additions are underlined, deletions are stricken):

“Chapter 3, Part I, Article 8, Section 3

“a. The president shall ordinarily appoint the delegates to the advisory committees of their choice as needed, according to the gifts of the delegates to that Synod. ~~All The appointments and any changes, with rationale,~~ shall be reported submitted to the General Synod Council for approval.

“Chapter 3, Part II, Article 1, Section 1

~~“k. Approval of Advisory Committee Appointments”~~

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### **WHO PROPOSED THIS?**

- The Rev. James Brumm, regular delegate from the Classis of Albany
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### **WHAT TO NOTE:**

- This was introduced as an item of new business by a delegate at the 2016 General Synod
- Its purpose is to clarify how the General Synod does business.
- Currently, the Order of Business of the General Synod states that the General Synod approve the advisory committee appointments. This allows the GSC (which functions on behalf of the General Synod between sessions) to approve appointments before General Synod begins.