

Draft of The Polity

of the NEW REFORMED BODY

under

THE FELLOWSHIP OF PRESBYTERIANS

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at politydox@gmail.com



THE
Fellowship
OF PRESBYTERIANS

This document is a draft. We welcome your feedback through January 6, 2012; send your comments and suggestions to politydox@gmail.com. At the Orlando Covenanting Conference (January 18-20), we will distribute a revised version of this Polity document.

This document is the result of hundreds of hours of prayer, research, dialog, and work by the Polity Task Force. We thank the Task Force for their careful, faithful work.

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Nine Things to Pay Attention to in the New Polity Draft

Presbyterians have a tradition of producing long, well-crafted documents that can either sit on the shelf or act in practical ways to inhibit ministry rather than advance it. We do not want to continue that tradition. This polity draft is in support of a larger mission to build flourishing churches that make disciples for Jesus Christ.

The Task Force on Polity strove for a connection to the best of our heritage and deliberately used the latest revision of The Book of Order as a template. This enables congregations to work with a somewhat familiar language and offers presbyteries assurance that they would be releasing congregations to a Reformed body.

We intend to stay flexible. We simplified this document to fewer than 25 pages. It offers a skeleton in hopes of combating our human tendency to bureaucratize and acknowledges that the needs of congregations and presbyteries will vary widely. Our desire is to offer a framework that encourages Spirit-led innovation.

Six Things to Look For:

1. We are committed to a structure and style of relating that is more horizontal than hierarchical.
2. We are focusing our life together on missional encouragement rather than regulation. We expect sessions and presbyteries to engage in regular assessments of missional strategy and effectiveness (a mirror to clergy peer assessment).

3. We are emphasizing increased flexibility in congregational leadership. This includes: reinstatement of the assistant pastor role; enhancement of the role of deacons and elders in leading ministry; and a more entrepreneurial approach to the leadership of new communities of faith.

4. We frequently use the term “ordinarily,” to offer guidance rather than constriction (quorums, size of the session, length of officers’ terms, educational requirements, etc.).

5. We believe congregations should be planters and incubators of new worshipping communities.

6. We are committed to property staying under the stewardship of the local session.

Three Things NOT To Look For:

1. We do not include a Directory for Worship. (This may be added later.)
2. We do not continue synods as we have known them. Presbyteries will be both local and regional expressions for the new Reformed body.
3. We do not include a section on Discipline. New approaches to the role of the presbytery and the National Synod will need to be spelled out.

We ask you to read this document slowly and give it careful attention. Consider both what it enables and what may be missing. We welcome your helpful responses through January 5, 2012.

1 **CHAPTER ONE**

2 **Congregations and Their Covenant Partners**

3 *Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has*
4 *been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them*
5 *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them*
6 *to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to*
7 *the very end of the age.” – Matt. 28:18-20 (NIV)*

8 **1.01 The Congregation**

9 *1.0101 Nature and Purpose*

10 The Church is visible whenever two or more are gathered in Jesus’ name. The
11 congregation is composed of members of the body of Christ who have covenanted
12 together to engage in the mission of God in their particular context. Each
13 congregation should strive to be a tangible, if provisional, demonstration of the
14 Kingdom of God. Congregations exist in a variety of forms yet have these ends in
15 common: gathering people for divine worship and nurturing relationships for
16 spiritual accountability and mutual ministry, all the while preparing disciples to be
17 the sent people of God in the world.

18 *1.0102 Covenants of Accountability*

19 While believers experience their membership in Christ’s body in spontaneous and
20 unstructured gatherings, they fulfill the Lord’s purposes best when they covenant
21 to fulfill the biblical vision of membership in particular congregations. These
22 covenantal relationships provide the real-life context for the Holy Spirit’s ongoing
23 transformation of believers into spiritual maturity, with the belief that these strong
24 relationships nurture teaching, encouragement, correction, and discipleship-in-
25 mission.

26 Similarly, though congregations discover that the Holy Spirit leads them to
27 network with a variety of other congregations in order to fulfill the Lord’s
28 purposes, they covenant with congregations to form a distinct expression of the
29 Church universal. These covenantal relationships provide the context for the Holy
30 Spirit’s continual reformation of the Church into more faithful and effective
31 participation in God’s mission. By submitting to the spiritual authority of their
32 colleagues, leaders of congregations honor Christ as the Lord of the Church, and
33 welcome the opportunity for renewal and refinement.

34 *1.0103 Accountability to the Councils of the NRB*

35 A “congregation,” as used in this *Form of Government*, refers to a formally
36 organized community chartered and recognized by a presbytery as provided in
37 this *Constitution*, and governed by this *Constitution*. In becoming covenant

38 partners (also called active members) of the congregation, Christ-followers put
39 themselves under the spiritual leadership of the session and higher councils.

40 **1.02 The Organizing of a Congregation**

41 A congregation in the NRB can be organized only by the authority of a presbytery
42 and shall function under the provisions of this *Constitution*. When a group of
43 Christ-followers discern that the Holy Spirit is leading them to become a
44 congregation, they shall craft a covenant which reflects their desire to be bound to
45 Christ and one another as a part of the body of Christ according to the *Essential*
46 *Tenants* and government of the NRB. After receiving this covenant and its
47 signatures, it shall be the sole discretion of the presbytery to declare them an
48 organized congregation. After receiving the presbytery's approval of its
49 candidates, the congregation shall then proceed to elect its pastor(s), elders, and
50 (if utilized) deacons. The presbytery shall prepare, examine, ordain, and install
51 these newly elected individuals.

52 **1.03 The Membership of a Congregation**

53 *1.0301 Baptism and Membership*

54 Through baptism an individual is joined to the Church universal, the body of
55 Christ. Through the covenant of membership an individual is joined to the local
56 congregation, and is able to be fully involved in its mission to the local
57 community and the world.

58 *1.0302 Openness to All*

59 The congregation's fellowship shall be open to all who seek to explore spiritual
60 life by participating in the fellowship of the risen Lord. The congregation shall be
61 gracious in providing pastoral care to all who consider themselves a part of the
62 congregation, in the hope that these spiritual friends might become members of
63 Christ's body. All who put their trust in Jesus Christ are welcomed to receive the
64 Sacrament of Holy Communion.

65 *1.0303 Entry into Membership as Covenant Partners*

66 After completing a meaningful preparation process, those who wish to embrace
67 the congregation's covenantal expectations may become covenant partners
68 (members) by action of the session after hearing testimony of their faith in Jesus
69 Christ as Lord and Savior. For those not previously baptized, the Sacrament of
70 Baptism is to be provided for these new members and offered to children under
71 their care. Individuals become covenant partners (members) in one of the
72 following ways:

- 73 a. Public profession of faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, after the
74 regenerating work of the Holy Spirit yields personal faith in Christ.
- 75 b. Reaffirmation of faith, for those previously professing faith publicly and
76 already baptized in the name of the triune God. If members of another

77 congregation, this transfer of membership shall be communicated to the
78 former congregation.

79 *1.0304 The Benefits of Covenantal Partnership*

80 While it benefits the work of the congregation to know the names of those who
81 are committed to full participation, it is those who make and keep such covenants
82 who receive the greatest benefits—they are positioned to receive the
83 encouragement, the support, and the correction that the Lord promises to those
84 who share spiritual fellowship.

85 *1.0305 The Congregation's Expectations of Covenantal Partnership*

86 Each covenant partner (member) shall strive to be faithful to Christ by
87 participating in the congregation's worship, fellowship, and service on an ongoing
88 basis. This faithfulness also involves the stewardship of finances. As each
89 covenant partner (member) grows in the grace of giving, financial support of the
90 congregation's mission and ministry should grow, along with tangible support for
91 other ministries that advance God's Kingdom. Faithfulness to Christ also involves
92 each covenant partner's dedication of time and talents for the congregation's
93 mission and ministry. Those who are invited to take significant leadership roles in
94 the congregation should ordinarily be members for at least a year, agree with the
95 *Essential Tenants* of the NRB, be trained and/or mentored, and be supervised.

96 Covenant partners (members) of the congregation have differing abilities, varied
97 spiritual gifts, and various levels of commitment. The session shall strive to create
98 an effective disciple-making, ministry-discernment process, and equip covenant
99 partners (members) to be missional Christians, being faithful to nurture covenant
100 partners (members) into spiritual maturity and significant ministry.

101 **1.04 Categories of Membership**

102 The membership of a congregation of the NRB includes baptized members and
103 covenant partners.

104 *1.0401 Baptized Member*

105 A baptized member is a person who has received the Sacrament of Baptism, but
106 has not made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

107 *1.0402 Covenant Partner*

108 A covenant partner is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has
109 been baptized, has been received into the membership of the church, has
110 voluntary submitted to the government of this church, and participates in the
111 church's worship and work. Covenant partners are eligible to vote in
112 congregational meetings.

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114 **1.05 Meetings of the Congregation**

115 *1.0501 Quorum*

116 The congregation shall hold an annual meeting and special meetings, as needed,
117 with a quorum of ten percent of the covenant partners (active membership), unless
118 the congregation, by its own rule, decides to alter the quorum requirement.

119 *1.0502 Calling Meetings*

120 Meetings of the congregation may be called by the session, by the presbytery, or
121 by the session when requested in writing by one-fourth of the covenant partners
122 (active members). Adequate notice of the meeting shall be given including
123 announcement in worship a minimum of two Sundays prior, as well as the
124 congregation's other avenues of communication.

125 *1.0503 Business that must be conducted at a Congregational Meeting*

- 126 a. Electing elders and trustees (as well as deacons, if the congregation
127 chooses. (see 2.03)).
- 128 b. Calling a pastor/head of staff or an associate pastor, or to request the
129 dissolution of such calls.
- 130 c. Buying, mortgaging, or selling real property.
- 131 d. Requesting that presbytery dismiss the congregation to another presbytery
132 of the NRB, or requesting that the presbytery dismisses the congregation
133 to another Reformed body. (Either requires a super-majority of two-thirds
134 of the covenant partners (active membership)).

135 Whenever permitted by law, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be
136 conducted at the same congregational meeting.

137 *1.0505 Moderator*

138 The pastor/head of staff shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the
139 congregation. If it is impractical, the pastor may ask another pastor or elder to
140 preside with session approval.

141 *1.0506 Secretary and Minutes*

142 The clerk of session shall ordinarily serve as secretary for all meetings of the
143 congregation. If it is impractical, the congregation shall elect a secretary for that
144 meeting. The session shall review and approve the final form of the minutes.

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146 **1.06 The Session**

147 *1.0601 Purpose and Composition*

148 Every congregation is governed by its session. Session consists of the elders duly
149 elected by and from the covenant partners (membership) of the congregation,
150 along with the congregation's installed pastors and associate pastors.

151 By its own rule, the congregation shall determine the number of elders, their
152 length of service, and the ordering of the session. The minimum number shall be
153 three active elders plus the moderator.

154 *1.0602 Meetings of the Session*

155 The pastor shall ordinarily moderate all meetings of the session. If it is
156 impractical, the pastor may ask another pastor or an elder to preside, with session
157 approval.

158 Meetings of the session, including its quorum, shall be governed by the latest
159 edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by their own rule a
160 congregation has adopted other procedures and practices.

161 The session shall hold stated meetings at least quarterly, and shall meet at the call
162 of the moderator, at the request of two or more elders, or at the request of
163 presbytery. Full minutes of the meetings and actions of the session shall be
164 maintained and shall be available to any covenant partner (member) of the
165 congregation or at the request of the presbytery.

166 *1.0603 The Responsibilities of the Session*

167 The session has responsibility and authority for governing the congregation and
168 guiding its mission for Christ in the world. In the Reformed tradition the marks of
169 the church are the proclamation of the Word, the Sacraments rightly celebrated,
170 and the exercise of discipline. Therefore the session is responsible for and
171 empowered to:

172 a. Provide for the worship and educational life of the congregation; provide a
173 place where the congregation may regularly worship; provide for the
174 regular preaching of the Word by a person properly approved; plan and
175 order the worship services of the congregation; lead the congregation in
176 ministries of evangelism, compassion, and justice; and develop and
177 nurture relations with other congregations.

178 b. Authorize and provide for the regular celebration of the Lord's Supper;
179 authorize the administration of Baptism; exercise due care and provide
180 sufficient education to the congregation and to new believers that the
181 Sacraments may be rightly received as means of grace.

182 c. Provide for and nurture the common life of the congregation; receive and
183 dismiss members; exercise oversight of all programs and finances of the
184 congregation; plan for and provide means of discipleship for the

- 185 congregation and new believers; train, examine, ordain and install those
186 men and women chosen to serve as elders; lead and teach the congregation
187 in matters of stewardship and Christian living; direct the ministry of
188 deacons, trustees, and all other organizations of the congregation; bear
189 witness against error in doctrine and practice; and serve in judicial matters
190 pertaining to the congregation as specified in the *Rules of Discipline*.
- 191 d. The session shall elect elder commissioners to the presbytery and may
192 propose to the presbytery matters of common interest or concern as well as
193 proposals to amend these *Rules of Order*.
- 194 e. The session shall maintain a Roll of Covenant Partners (members) and a
195 Roll of Baptisms. Session may by its own rule grant affiliate status to
196 members of a congregation in another Christian denomination.
- 197 f. The session shall adopt and administer an annual budget and shall publish
198 it to the congregation. The session shall purchase appropriate casualty and
199 liability insurance for the program, property, and personnel of the
200 congregation.
- 201 g. The session shall arrange for an independent financial review annually,
202 and shall publish the report to the congregation and to the presbytery.
- 203 h. The session shall evaluate the congregation's ministry and mission
204 annually and report to the presbytery for reasons of mutual accountability
205 and the sharing of best practices.

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CHAPTER TWO

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Ordained and Commissioned Ministry

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*For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus
to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

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It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

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– Eph. 2:10, 4:11-13 (NIV)

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2.001 God's mission requires ordered leadership

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Before the foundation of the world, God set a plan of mission to reconcile the world to Himself and chose to use the Church as His instrument of reconciliation. It is incumbent upon all members of the body of Christ to participate in the work of building one another up in Christ and be deployed for His work in the world. God calls some individuals to exercise specific formal leadership, which is modeled after the mind of Christ. The specific offices recognized in the NRB are elder, deacon, and pastor.

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2.0101 Qualifications of officers

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Elders and deacons are ordained and installed by the congregation. Pastors are ordained and installed by the presbyteries. Ordaining bodies must ensure that all officers adhere to the *Essential Tenets* of the NRB. Failure of officers to continue to adhere to these standards is grounds for a session or presbytery to remove an officer from service according to the *Rules of Discipline* in this constitution.

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2.0102 Preparation and ordination of officers

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Ordaining bodies shall determine the appropriate course of preparation, insuring that candidates for ordination meet all the requirements in this *Form of Government*. After demonstrating their readiness for service through an examination process, the candidates shall affirm their vows and be ordained by representatives of that ordaining body in a service of public worship.

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2.0103 Ordination vows

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a. Do you believe in One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and do you boldly declare Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, and acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the church?

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b. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God inspired by the Holy Spirit, as the unique witness to Jesus Christ and the authority for Christian faith and life?

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- 244 c. Do you receive and adopt without hesitation the *Essential Tenets* of the
 245 NRB as a reliable exposition of what Scripture teaches us to do and to
 246 believe, and will you be guided by them in your life and ministry?
- 247 d. Relying on the Holy Spirit, do you humbly submit to God’s call on your
 248 life, committing yourself to God’s mission and fulfilling your ministry in
 249 obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture and guided by
 250 our confessions?
- 251 e. Will you be governed by the NRB’s polity and discipline? And will you
 252 be accountable to your fellow elders, deacons, and pastors as you lead?
- 253 f. Do you promise to be faithful in maintaining the truth of the Gospel and
 254 the peace, unity and purity of the Church?
- 255 g. (1) (for elder) Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people in
 256 their worship, nurture, and service to God?
 257
 258 (2) (for deacon) Will you be a faithful deacon, serving the people, urging
 259 concern and directing the people’s help to those in need?
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 261 ~~(3) (for pastor) Will you be a faithful minister of the Gospel of Jesus~~
 262 ~~Christ by proclaiming the good news, teaching the faith, showing the~~
 263 ~~people God’s mission, and caring for the people?~~

264 *2.0104 Questions to the congregation*

- 265 a. (for elders/deacons) Do we, the covenant partners of this congregation,
 266 accept (names) as elders or deacons, chosen by God through the voice of
 267 this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ according to the
 268 Word of God and the *Constitution* of the NRB?

269 Do we agree to pray for them, to encourage them, to respect their
 270 decisions and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ, who alone
 271 is Head of the Church?

272 *Having answered these questions in the affirmative, those to be ordained*
 273 *shall kneel for prayer and the laying on of hands by other ordained*
 274 *officers.*

275 *The Moderator will say to the ordained:* You are now elders or deacons in
 276 the Church and for this congregation. Whatever you do, in word or deed,
 277 do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the
 278 Father through Him. Amen.

- 279 b. (for pastor) Do we, the covenant partners of this congregation, accept
 280 (name) as our pastor (associate pastor, assistant pastor), chosen by God
 281 through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus
 282 Christ, according to the Word of God and the *Constitution* of the NRB?

283 Do we agree to pray for him (her), to encourage him (her), to respect his
284 (her) decisions and to follow as he (she) guides us, serving Jesus Christ,
285 who alone is Head of the Church?

286 Do we agree to pay him (her) fairly and provide for his (her) welfare as he
287 (she) works among us?

288 Will we listen to the word he (she) preaches, welcome his (her) pastoral
289 care, and honor his (her) servant leadership and authority as he (she) seeks
290 to honor Jesus Christ?

291 *Having answered these questions in the affirmative, the candidate to be*
292 *ordained and/or installed will kneel and the presbytery shall, with prayer*
293 *and the laying on of hands, ordain the candidate to the ministry of the*
294 *Gospel of Jesus Christ and install him (her) to the particular pastoral*
295 *responsibility. The presbytery will invite other ordained pastors and*
296 *elders to join in the laying on of hands.*

297 *The presiding member of presbytery will say: You are now a minister of*
298 *the Gospel of Jesus Christ, a pastor (associate pastor, assistant pastor) for*
299 *this congregation. Whatever you do, in word and deed, do everything in*
300 *the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*
301 *Amen.*

302 **2.02 The Ministry of Elders**

303 Elders are given authority and responsibility, along with pastors, to oversee the
304 spiritual health of the congregation as well as the congregation's faithfulness to
305 God's mission. Elders shall be elected by the congregation.

306 **2.03 The Ministry of Deacons**

307 Deacons lead ministries that nurture fellowship and caregiving within and beyond
308 the congregation. Deacons may also be used to preach and teach. By its own rule,
309 the congregation shall determine if the ministry of deacons shall be utilized and
310 the manner in which they are selected for service. The session shall oversee and
311 direct the ministry of the deacons.

312 **2.04 The Ministry of Pastors**

313 Pastors are to use the spiritual gifts for ministry, with a particular emphasis on the
314 gifts of teaching and leadership. A pastor is to nurture the spiritual health and
315 maturity of the body of Christ in order that the body may be equipped to partner
316 with God in His redemptive work in the world. In addition to adherence to the
317 *Essential Tenets*, presbyteries shall ensure that candidates for ministry are
318 adequately trained for their task. Training shall include a bachelor's degree (or
319 equivalent) and ordinarily a Masters of Divinity degree at an accredited
320 theological seminary as well as appropriate hands-on ministry experience and
321 mentoring. Candidates for ministry must demonstrate significant theological and
322 biblical competence as well as the necessary skills for pastoral ministry.

323 2.0401 Categories and responsibilities of pastors

324 Pastors are members of the presbytery. Thus, their ministry and calling is
325 confirmed by the presbytery or authorized committee that is responsible for
326 examining and credentialing its pastors. In order to ensure maximum deployment
327 for the kingdom of God, as well as ensuring the core integrity of theology and
328 ministry, categories and responsibilities of pastors are as follows:

- 329 a. *Pastor/Head of Staff* – Pastors/Heads of Staff or Co-Pastors/Heads of Staff
330 are called by the congregation and shall have the responsibility to
331 moderate session and congregational meetings. He or she is a member of
332 presbytery with voice and vote.
- 333 b. *Associate Pastor* – Associate pastors are called by a congregation upon
334 recommendation by the session. They are members of presbytery with
335 voice and vote.
- 336 c. *Assistant Pastor* – Assistant pastors are called by the session or
337 pastor/head of staff according to rule of the session. Assistant pastors have
338 voice but no vote in presbytery.
- 339 d. *Interim Pastor* – Interim pastors are called by the session and may be used
340 in times of transition when a congregation is without a pastor/head of
341 staff. Interim pastors shall have the same responsibilities and privileges in
342 presbytery as pastors/heads of staff.
- 343 e. *Pastor in a Validated Ministry* – Pastors may be authorized to serve in
344 validated ministries outside a local congregation. Validated ministries
345 might include service in a presbytery, educational institution, hospital, or a
346 variety of mission fields. The presbytery shall validate and annually
347 review the pastor’s ministry. Ordinarily, pastors in validated ministry will
348 be expected to also take part in the life and ministry of a local NRB
349 congregation. Pastors in validated ministries have voice but no vote in
350 presbytery.
- 351 f. *Affiliate Pastor* – A pastor may be ordained in a different body and may
352 become an affiliate member of the NRB. Affiliate pastors must adhere to
353 the *Essential Tenets* of the NRB. The presbytery shall determine the
354 suitability of an affiliate pastor. If an affiliate pastor serves as pastor/head
355 of staff of a non-union NRB congregation, then the affiliate pastor shall
356 have voice and vote in presbytery; otherwise the affiliate pastor shall just
357 have voice.
- 358 g. *Honorably Retired Pastor* – Pastors may request the status of honorably
359 retired. Honorably retired pastors will have voice but no vote in
360 presbytery. If an honorably retired pastor is called to an interim pastor
361 position, they would have both voice and vote in presbytery.

362 *2.0402 Peer Review*

363 Pastors and ministries are healthier when there are opportunities for mutually
364 supportive relationships. Therefore, pastors shall participate in a peer review with
365 other pastors. The purpose of this review is to coach, encourage and pray for one
366 another as they strive for greater missional effectiveness. This peer review shall:

- 367 a. Explore the health of each other's current ministry.
368 b. Explore the future objectives for each other's ministry.
369 c. Address challenges and obstacles to meeting those objectives.
370 d. Share best practices and insights.
371 e. Explore each other's physical, spiritual, relational and emotional health.

372 These peer reviews may occur within presbyteries or affinity networks (*see*
373 *5.0201*). Under its Committee on Ministry, presbytery shall ensure that an
374 appropriate peer review is conducted at least annually.

375 **2.05 Commissioning for particular service**

376 *2.0501 Deployment of officers for greater missional ministry*

377 In order to better facilitate the mission and ministry of a presbytery and its
378 congregation, as well as to maximize the gifts of the totality of the body of Christ,
379 it is often advantageous to commission elders and deacons to more extensive
380 levels of service than ordinarily afforded these offices. There are two general
381 ways in which officers may be commissioned to provide pastoral leadership and
382 administer the sacraments. First, they may serve in various ways within a
383 congregation under the supervision of the session and a pastor/head of staff or
384 interim pastor. Second, an elder or deacon may be commissioned to serve in the
385 role of pastor/head of staff for a congregation or a new church development. It is
386 appropriate to refer to individuals serving in either capacity as "lay pastor." The
387 session shall pre-authorize the administration of the sacraments, and also
388 determine the process by which pre-authorization occurs.

389 *2.0502 Service within a congregation under session and Pastor/Head of Staff*

390 The Church exists wherever two or more are gathered in the name of Jesus.
391 Therefore, it is appropriate to celebrate sacraments in these smaller units. These
392 smaller units include, but are not limited to: small groups, missional communities,
393 retreats, leaders of satellite congregations, and house church gatherings. If an
394 officer has been commissioned by the session to lead these groups in mission or
395 ministry and has been appropriately trained, he or she shall be authorized to
396 administer the sacraments in these communities. The pastor and session shall
397 oversee those who are commissioned to such service within a congregation. This
398 commission shall be for a period of twelve months and may be renewed
399 indefinitely.

400 *2.0503 Service within a congregation as the Pastor/Head of Staff*

401 The presbytery, in consultation with the session or other responsible committee,
402 may authorize an elder or deacon to be commissioned to serve in the role of
403 pastor/head of staff of a local congregation or a new church development. With
404 approval of the presbytery, these individuals could moderate session and
405 congregational meetings, administer the sacraments and, where allowed by law,
406 perform marriages. The presbytery shall ensure training to include theological
407 education, and ministry skill development as well as continued mentorship during
408 this commission. This commission shall be for a period of twelve months and may
409 be renewed indefinitely. Because this officer is fulfilling the pastoral role for a
410 congregation they shall be enrolled as a member of presbytery during their
411 commission and be given voice and vote at presbytery meetings.

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CHAPTER THREE

414

Councils of the NRB

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Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They served as judges for the people at all times
– Ex. 18:24-26 (NIV)

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3.01 Presbytery

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3.0101 Purpose

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The presbytery as a covenant community exercises apostolic authority by and for the nurture and benefit of its congregations, that the communities they serve may know the love and invitation of Christ.

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3.0102 Membership

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The members of the presbytery are its congregations, pastors installed in service to member congregations, pastors serving in validated ministries, and pastors honorably retired. A presbytery shall be constituted of at least 10 congregations.

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3.0103 Duties

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The presbytery has the authority and pastoral responsibility to:

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a. promote the health of the covenant community to the end that its congregations and members may bear fruit for the Kingdom of God.

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b. charter and receive new congregations into the presbytery.

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c. dismiss congregations to other presbyteries or denominations.

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d. exercise special care and oversight of congregations which do not have an installed pastor, and to appoint the moderator of its session.

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436

e. dissolve congregations when their mission work has ceased.

437

f. authorize the celebration of the Lord's Supper beyond particular congregations.

438

439

g. receive, dismiss, examine, install and discipline pastors.

440

h. enroll, dismiss, and examine candidates and ordain them to called service.

441

i. validate the call of ministers to service beyond a congregation.

442

j. settle differences between congregations and pastors.

443

k. propose amendments to the *Constitution*.

444

l. elect commissioners to wider councils of the NRB.

445 m. promote and encourage the missional effectiveness of its congregations.
446 Each presbytery shall develop an instrument to assist its congregations in
447 their annual review and narrative report of their ministry and mission.
448 These annual reports shall be reviewed and discussed by the presbytery
449 with each congregation's session.

450 *3.0104 Meetings*

451 The presbytery shall organize itself to accomplish these tasks and fulfill these
452 responsibilities, and may delegate authority to elected committees and
453 commissions. The presbytery shall hold stated meetings at least twice a year.
454 Meetings of the presbytery, including its quorum shall be governed by the latest
455 edition of *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised*, unless by its own rule the
456 presbytery has adopted other procedures and practices. Each presbytery shall
457 develop a manual of administrative operations setting forth its structures and
458 procedures.

459 *3.0105 Required Committees*

460 a. *Committee on Ministry*

461 Each presbytery shall elect a Committee on Ministry which shall have
462 broad responsibility for the pastoral relationships of the presbytery. The
463 Committee on Ministry shall have at least eight members, all elected by
464 the presbytery, with membership being made up of an equal number of
465 elders and pastors. No more than two members may be from the same
466 congregation. The Committee on Ministry shall be available to any session
467 or pastor of the presbytery. The presbytery shall, by its own rule, delegate
468 and determine the authority and functions of the Committee on Ministry.

469 b. *Permanent Judicial Committee*

470 Each presbytery shall elect a Permanent Judicial Committee as specified in
471 the *Rules of Discipline*.

472 *3.0106 Records*

473 The presbytery shall keep full and accurate records of its proceedings and make
474 them available on request to any session or pastor of the presbytery. Each
475 presbytery shall annually conduct an independent financial review and shall
476 publish the report in its minutes.

477 *3.0107 Finances*

478 The presbytery may develop programs, engage staff, adopt budgets, and acquire
479 and manage resources as it deems expedient to the mission of Christ. To support
480 its function and ministry the presbytery may, by its own rule, apportion expenses
481 to its congregations.

482 *3.0108 Policies and Procedures*

483 Each presbytery shall establish processes and procedures for recruiting, training,
484 and encouraging candidates to the ministry.

485 Each presbytery shall adopt a policy for the prevention of sexual misconduct
486 among its members. This policy shall govern the presbytery's congregations
487 unless a particular session, with the consent of the presbytery, adopts its own
488 policy.

489 **3.02 Synod**

490 *3.0201 Purpose*

491 The synod is the widest council of the NRB giving direction and guidance to the
492 presbyteries and congregations. The synod shall assess and proclaim the missional
493 vision and theology of the NRB.

494 *3.0202 Duties*

495 The synod shall:

- 496 a. provide linkage of presbyteries to one another for mutual encouragement.
497 b. correspond and connect with global mission partners, other denominations
498 and ministry partners.
499 c. maintain the *Constitution* and *Essential Tenets* of the NRB.
500 d. where appropriate and necessary, provide services (i.e. pension and health
501 insurance) for the NRB.

502 The synod shall have the power to:

- 503 a. constitute, divide, and dissolve presbyteries, and settle disputes between
504 them.
505 b. receive and approve union presbyteries into the NRB.
506 c. adopt an annual budget and may receive, hold, manage, sell and expend
507 funds and other assets.
508 d. hire staff.
509 e. represent the NRB to ecumenical and mission partners when needed.
510 f. develop a manual of operations for its activities and functions.

511 *3.0203 Meetings*

512 The synod shall meet annually. The meetings shall serve the purpose of
513 encouraging presbyteries and churches in their mission as well as conducting the
514 business necessary for the mission of the NRB. Voting members of the synod are

515 those individuals commissioned by and from their presbyteries. Presbyteries shall
516 commission an equal number of ministers and elders. The synod, by its own rule,
517 shall determine the number of commissioners from each presbytery, and each
518 presbytery shall be entitled to at least one elder and one pastor commissioner.

519 *3.0204 Records*

520 The synod shall keep full and accurate records of its proceedings and make them
521 available on request to any member presbytery or congregation. The synod shall
522 annually conduct an independent financial review and shall publish the report in
523 its minutes.

524 *3.0205 Finances*

525 To support its function and ministry, the synod may, by its own rule, apportion
526 expenses to its presbyteries and/or affinity networks.

527 *3.0206 Policies and Procedures*

528 The synod shall develop a manual of administrative operations setting forth its
529 structures and procedures.

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CHAPTER FOUR

533

Civil Authority and Property

534

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;

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–Psa. 24:1 (NIV)

536

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.

537

–Psa. 127:1 (NIV)

538

4.01 Incorporation and Trustees

539

Where permitted by civil law, each congregation, presbytery, and the synod shall cause a corporation to be formed and maintained. If incorporation is not permitted, individual trustees shall be elected from the congregation's membership in the same manner as for electing elders, or by rule of the presbytery for its trustees.

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4.0101 The Congregation

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The corporation of a congregation so formed, or the individual trustees, shall have the power to:

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a. receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer property, real or personal, for the congregation or presbytery, provided that in buying, selling, and mortgaging real property, the trustees shall act only after the approval of the congregation, granted at a duly constituted meeting.

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b. accept and execute deeds of title to such property, and to hold and defend title to such property.

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c. manage any permanent special funds for the mission of the congregation.

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The powers and duties of the trustees shall not infringe upon the powers and duties of the session.

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4.0102 The Presbytery

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The corporation of a presbytery so formed, or its individual trustees, shall have the power to receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer property, real or personal, for and at the direction of the presbytery.

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The presbytery shall not direct the use, co-sign, or guaranty any debt instrument, nor will it guaranty performance of any instrument securing the debt, be it mortgage or deed of trust or a security agreement.

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4.0103 The Synod

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The corporation of the synod so formed, shall have the power to receive, hold, encumber, manage and transfer property, real or personal, for and at the direction of the synod, to accept and execute deeds of title to such property, and to defend title to such property.

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568 The corporation of the synod shall have the power to manage any permanent
569 special funds accepted by and for purposes directed by the synod.

570 The powers and duties of the synod corporation shall not infringe on the powers
571 and duties of the synod, and the corporation shall in all matters be subject to the
572 direction, review, and control of the synod.

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CHAPTER FIVE

575

Ecumenicity and Union

576

Aim for perfection, be of one mind, live in peace.

577

And the God of love and peace will be with you. – 2 Cor. 13:11

578

5.01 Ecumenicity

579

NRB recognizes that God calls all to one faith, one Lord, one baptism in the body of Christ, the Church. The center of this life together is based in the covenant promises of the Lord, who is known as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We trust in Christ as Savior and commit to life together with Christ as our Lord. As the called people of God, we desire unity of ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. As heirs of the Reformed tradition, we recognize that we are but one expression of that spiritual life together. We desire communication, cooperation and partnership with other Christian groups, noting common goals where possible and conversation where core differences exist.

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5.02 Reformed and Presbyterian

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We cherish our common history with all expressions of Reformed and Presbyterian churches. We wish to partner in mission and ministry, while confessing the common historical biblical and orthodox faith as given to us in God's Word, our authority for faith and life.

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5.0201 Affinity Network

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A congregation of joint witness, which adheres to the *Constitution* of the NRB, may request to be part of an affinity network or presbytery of the NRB while remaining as members in the PC(USA) and functioning as part of an established PC(USA) presbytery.

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This joint witness is centered around a common mission or affinity such as outreach to ethnic, age or mission specific groups, worship size or style, or geographical proximity.

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5.0202 Union Congregations

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Congregations, historically members of the PC(USA) or other Reformed denominations, who wish to maintain that membership while joining with the NRB and who recognize and teach the *Essential Tenets* may request to join a presbytery of the NRB after a period and process of discernment, and a two-thirds vote of the congregation at a duly called meeting. This joint witness shall be formed in communication with the presbytery or comparable governing body of each denomination. In matters of disagreement, the less permissive rules shall govern.

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610 5.0203 *Union Presbyteries*

611 A presbytery of the PC(USA) may unite to form a union presbytery with one or
612 more comparable councils or governing bodies, each of which is a member of
613 another Reformed body, with the approval of the governing body of which each is
614 a part. Where the constitutions of the two denominations differ, the less
615 permissive rules shall govern. A union presbytery shall be created by the adoption
616 of a plan of union by two-thirds vote of each presbytery or governing body that is
617 party to the union. The synod and/or governing body having jurisdiction over
618 each of the uniting bodies shall approve the plan of union.

619 **5.03 Other denominations**

620 Out of our common Protestant heritage, partnership and joint congregational
621 witness will be encouraged where mission, ministry, and collegiality can be
622 coordinated and approved by the appropriate governing bodies, and where the
623 *Constitution* and *Essential Tenets* of the NRB can be followed.

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CHAPTER 6

627

Amending the Constitution

6.01 Compendium to Worship

629 The life of the Church is revealed in the worship, witness, and service of the
630 people of God. Our worship, witness and service are based upon Holy Scripture,
631 instructed by our confessions and led by the Holy Spirit. Classical Reformed
632 worship is rich in heritage, expressed in many traditions and diverse cultures. The
633 NRB shall develop a *Compendium to Worship* that will be descriptive of our
634 theology which underlies the life of our congregations. The *Compendium to*
635 *Worship* will be written and included as part of the *Book of Order* for the NRB.

6.02 Rules of Discipline

637 The NRB shall develop a *Rules of Discipline*. The *Rules of Discipline* will be
638 written and included as part of the *Book of Order* for the NRB.

6.03 Amending this Constitution

640 Presbyteries may overture the synod of the NRB for changes in this *Constitution*
641 as follows:

- 642 a. Two presbyteries must concur in the proposed changes and overture the
643 larger body with changes.
- 644 b. The synod may amend and transmit the proposed changes to the
645 constitution to the presbyteries for their affirmative or negative vote, and a
646 two-thirds majority of the presbyteries shall be required for adoption.



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