**Office of the Stated Clerk**

**United Reformed Churches in North America**

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December 15, 2022

To all Consistories of the URCNA:

Synod Niagara 2022 passed five matters requiring ratification no later than May 1, 2023, for those items to take effect. Phase II ecumenical relationships require a simple majority vote of the consistories while the Church Order changes require a two-thirds majority vote of the consistories. The five matters are:

1. Ratification of entering Phase II, Ecumenical Fellowship, with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT). See Art. 57, Recommendation 1 of the [*Minutes of Synod Niagara 2022*.](https://www.urcna.org/file_retrieve/101185)
2. Ratification of entering Phase II, Ecumenical Fellowship, with the Reformed Church of Indonesia (GGRI-NTT). See Art. 57, Recommendation 2 of the [*Minutes of Synod Niagara 2022*](https://www.urcna.org/file_retrieve/101185).
3. Ratification of entering Phase II, Ecumenical Fellowship, with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. See Art. 57, Recommendation 3 of the [*Minutes of Synod Niagara 2022*](https://www.urcna.org/file_retrieve/101185).

Grounds for all three: (provided by CECCA from their protocol)

1. A Phase II relationship with a church federation will be proposed when there are no outstanding issues with this federation with which we are in Ecumenical Contact, and we have made a visit to this federation.
2. CECCA will ordinarily not wait longer than two synods (i.e., four years from the year that Ecumenical Contact was established) to propose to synod that the URCNA move to Ecumenical Fellowship with these churches.
3. Ratification of Church Order Article 47 to read: *(new words in italics)*. See Art. 49 of the [*Minutes of Synod Niagara 2022*](https://www.urcna.org/file_retrieve/101185).

**Article 47 The Church’s Missionary Calling**

The church's missionary task is to preach the Word of God to the unconverted. When this task is to be performed beyond the field of an organized church, it is to be carried out by ministers of the Word set apart to this labor, who are called, supported, and supervised by their Consistories. *A local Consistory shall seek the advice of classis before sending a foreign or home missionary to a field or removing a foreign or home missionary from a field.* The churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries.

Grounds:

* 1. Our churches have agreed to “make every effort to unify all of our resources (gifts, talents, and finances) as one united federation in order to bring the gospel from our homes and churches to the nations of the world” (Acts of Synod Nyack 2012, pp. 516-517). Our commitment to unity would be enhanced and displayed through this codified change to our Church Order.
	2. To wisely send a man to the foreign field requires significant consideration and generally commits the federation to ministry in an area of the world for a considerable period of time. Having a broad base of support, agreement, and advice is an invaluable step to seeing this done well among our churches, whether this be the first man sent to a field or an additional man sent to help reinforce the work that is already going.
	3. We have agreed on page 9 in our church planting manual (*How to Plant a Reformed Church*) that sending a man to begin a new work domestically should be done with the advice and awareness of the Classis. Requiring this advice in our Church Order helps a greater representation of the federation to be involved and supportive of the growing mission in the URCNA and gives good and helpful accountability to local Consistories eager to begin new mission works.
	4. Removing a missionary from a field (foreign or home) has significant consequences for the missionary and the church/field where he served. Requiring the advice of Classis protects both the missionary and the field that we, as a federation, have supported.
	5. Article 11 of our Church Order recognizes the seriousness of dissolving a relationship between a pastor and a congregation. However, within the range of missions and church planting, there is no protection or safeguards in place for the wellbeing of either the missionary or the believers (and community) that this man may have served. This Church Order change would recognize that, equally in a mission, a minister’s call is weighty and should not be changed without the input of the classis.
	6. The inclusion of this line before the statement, “The churches should assist each other in the support of their missionaries,” presents the advice of Classis in a positive light that reminds us this advice is sought as we seek to support our missionaries. Having the advice of Classis before sending a man to a field increases the base of support within the URC for each of our prospective missions.
1. Ratification of Church Order Articles 55 and 56 to replace the current Article 55 and with a renumbering of all subsequent articles. See Article 52 of the[*Minutes of Synod Niagara 2022*](https://www.urcna.org/file_retrieve/101185).

**Article 55 – The Discipline of a Member**

 A communicant member whose sin is properly made known to the consistory, and who then obstinately rejects the loving admonitions of the consistory, shall, in agreement with the Word of God, be subject to church discipline according to the following stages:

1. Silent Censure:

 A member who persists in sin shall be suspended by the consistory from all the privileges of church membership, including using the sacraments. Such suspension shall not be made public by the consistory.

1. Public Discipline:

 If the silent censure and subsequent admonitions do not bring about repentance, and before proceeding to excommunication, the sinner's impenitence shall be made known to the congregation by indicating both the member's offense and failure to heed scriptural admonitions, so that the congregation may speak with and pray for this member. Public discipline shall be done with the use of the appropriate liturgical form, in three steps, the interval between which shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.

* + 1. In the first step, the name of the sinner need not be mentioned so that he may be somewhat spared.
		2. In the second step, the consistory shall seek the advice of classis before proceeding, whereupon the member's name shall be mentioned to the congregation.
		3. In the third step, the congregation shall be informed that unless there is repentance, the member will be excommunicated from the church on a specified date.
1. Excommunication: If these steps of public discipline do not bring about repentance, but rather harden the sinner in his ways, the consistory shall proceed to the extreme remedy, namely excommunication, in agreement with the Word of God and with the use of the appropriate liturgical form.

Grounds

1. This article more clearly defines and outlines the proper stages and steps of the disciplinary process. This article will be of immeasurable help and service to consistories, particularly those with inexperienced elders.
2. Our current Article 55 does not explicitly use the language of “Silent Censure,” nor does our article explain how silent censure is to be applied and that it is not to be made public. All of these are helpful distinctions.
3. The paragraph on the resignation of members (which was an addition to Article 55 adopted by Synod Wheaton 2018) could now have its own article and be easier to access by our consistories.
4. The words “and voting at congregational meetings” are not found in the current Church Order.

**Article 56 – The Exclusion of a Member Due to Resignation**

 In the event a member seeks to resign while under church discipline, the consistory need not proceed further with the aforementioned three steps of discipline while they warn the member against resignation. If the member remains impenitent and persists in resigning, the consistory should seek the advice of classis before acting to exclude him from membership*.* The consistory need not seek advice if classis has previously advised it to proceed to the second step of public discipline. Having been advised by classis, the consistory may proceed to exclude from membership the one who is forsaking Christ’s church. The consistory should notify the person of this action, admonishing him and calling him to repentance. The consistory should also inform the congregation of this action and solicit their prayers for the former member. (See Appendix 8)

Grounds:

1. It makes sense to separate the stages and steps of discipline from membership resignation (as resignation is actually an intrusion upon and an interruption of the process of discipline).
2. For ease of reading and access, it is wise to dedicate a separate article to membership resignation.
3. The title of Article 56 reflects the idea that exclusion and resignation are joined together in Appendix 8.3, emphasizes the action of the consistory in response to the sin of resignation, and is parallel with the title of Article 55.

Please use the attached ballot to vote “yes” or “no” regarding ratification of these five matters. Scan the completed ballot to pdf document and send it by email to the Stated Clerk at StatedClerk@urcna.org . **Ballots must be received no later than May 1, 2023**.

**NOTE:** Past synods have determined that ratification by the synodically-approved consistories means by *all* synodically-approved consistories, whether they vote or not. That means that **if you do *not* vote, that will have the same effect as a “*no*” vote.**

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Your servant,



Rev. Ralph A. Pontier

Stated Clerk

United Reformed Churches in North America

Attachment: Ballot

Please scan the completed ballot to a pdf document and send it by email to the Stated Clerk at StatedClerk@urcna.org . Ballots must be received no later than **May 1, 2023**.

The consistory of \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Church,

located at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

submits the following votes on ratification of synodical decisions.

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| \_\_\_\_\_ YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO | Ratification of entering Phase II, Ecclesiastical Fellowship, with the Evangelical Reformed Church in Latvia (ERCLAT).(See the attached letter for the grounds.) |
| \_\_\_\_\_ YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO | Ratification of entering Phase II, Ecclesiastical Fellowship, with the Reformed Church of Indonesia (GGRI-NTT).(See the attached letter for the grounds.) |
| \_\_\_\_\_ YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO | Ratification of entering Phase II, Ecclesiastical Fellowship, with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia.(See the attached letter for the grounds.) |
| \_\_\_\_\_ YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO | Ratification of Church Order **Article 47** **The Church’s Missionary Calling**(See the attached letter for the wording and the grounds.) |
| \_\_\_\_\_ YES\_\_\_\_\_ NO | Ratification of Church Order Article 55 and 56 to replace the current Article 55. **Article 55 – The Discipline of a Member** **Article 56 – The Exclusion of a Member Due to Resignation** (See the attached letter for the wording and the grounds.) |

Done in Consistory \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date

Signed \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Officer of Consistory