
From: United Reformed Churches in North America
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To: webmaster@URCNA.org
Subject: Corrected Overture 17
Attachments: 17 SWUS 3 Church Order Editorial Changes - Part 2 Rev.pdf

From the office of the Stated Clerk

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Attached is a corrected copy of Overture 17. In editing the Provisional Agenda, about 25 words (out of 4,185 words) were inadvertently deleted. If you scroll to the last page, page 10, you will find two sections highlighted in yellow. The words highlighted in yellow were the word eliminated in the *Provisional Agenda*.

This overture has been assigned to Advisory Committee 4. Please take note.

No revised copy of the entire *Provisional Agenda*, with this correction, will be distributed at this time.

Overture 17

Editorial Changes to the Church Order (Part 2)

Background

It has been almost 30 years since the Church Order for the URCNA was written and adopted. It was put together by a well-qualified committee and presented to the churches at the first synod in 1996. At that time, there were a few changes made by the committee. It was also decided to suspend the article regarding changing the Church Order, so that more input could be received from the churches.

At our second synod, St. Catharines 1997, there were 71 overtures requesting changes to the Church Order, in addition to the dozen changes recommended by the Church Order Committee. Some were adopted; some were not. Since that time, there have been approximately two dozen more changes made to fine-tune the Church Order. The accomplished result of all of this is a Church Order that specifically meets the needs of the federation. However, the unintended result of this process has been a lack of internal consistency of language among the articles. The intent of this overture is to provide editorial consistency within the Church Order.

We believe that most of these recommendations are not substantive, but that they are only editorial in nature.

Overture

Classis Southwest U.S. overtures Synod Escondido 2024 to make the following changes to the Church Order in order to provide internal consistency of language.

IV. Ecclesiastical Discipline

1. In **Article 51**, in the first sentence, change the word “Christian” to “church” so that it reads: “Since church discipline is spiritual in nature . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the article parallel to Article 11.a., 25, 26, 55, 56, Appendix 8.2, and 8.3.

2. In **Article 52**, delete the word “Addressing” in the title of the article so that it reads: “Article 52: Private Sins.”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the title parallel to the title of Article 53 which does not include the word “addressing.”

3. In **Article 53**, change the word “secret” to “private” so that it reads: “Private sins from which the sinner repents . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the article consistent with the title of Article 52.

4. In **Article 53**, add the words “in love” after the word “admonished” so that it reads: “. . . sins from which the sinner repents after being admonished in love by one person . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the article consistent with the wording of Article 54.

5. In **Article 54**, change the words “by two or three persons” to “in the presence of two or three witnesses” so that it reads: “If anyone has been admonished in love in the presence of two or three witnesses concerning . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the article consistent with the wording of Article 53.

6. In **Article 54**, change the word “secret” to “private” so that it reads: “. . . two or three witnesses concerning a private sin and does not repent . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the article consistent with Article 52 and 53 [depending on the disposition of part 3 and 5 of this overture.]

7. In **Article 54**, change the words “shall be brought to” to “shall be made known to” so that it reads: “. . . the matter shall be made known to the Consistory.”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the article consistent with Article 53 and 55

8. In **Article 55**, change the words “is properly made known to” to “has been properly made known to” so that it reads: “. . . member whose sin has been properly made known to the consistory . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording consistent with Article 53, and 54 [depending on the disposition of part 7 of this overture.]

9. In **Article 55**, make the following additions (in *italics*) and deletions (in ~~strike through~~): “. . . be subject to church discipline ~~according to~~ *in the following three stages:*”

And in b.: “. . . with the use of the appropriate liturgical form, *in the following three steps*, the interval between which . . .”

Ground:

This wording makes the article more explicit and internally consistent.

10. In **Article 56**, change the title from “The Exclusion of a Member Due to Resignation” to “The Discipline of a Member Due to Resignation.”

Grounds:

a. This makes it clear the exclusion is disciplinary in character.

b. It avoids any potential confusion between the title of this article and Article 59.

11. In **Article 56**, change the word “steps” to “stages” so that it reads: “the consistory need not proceed further with the aforementioned three stages of discipline . . .”

Ground:

This wording makes it explicit that we are referring to the stages of discipline, rather than one of the three steps of the sub-category of Public Discipline.

12. In **Article 56**, in the second sentence, change the word “should” to “shall” so that it reads: “. . . the consistory shall seek the advice of classis . . .”

Grounds:

a. Seeking the advice of classis is not optional.

b. This makes the wording consistent with Article 55.b.2.

13. In **Article 56**, in the third sentence, change the words “advised it to proceed” to “advised that it may proceed” so that it reads: “. . . if classis has previously advised that it may proceed to the second step . . .”

Grounds:

- a. This makes it clear that the classis is not instructing the consistory to proceed, but merely giving its advice that it may proceed.
- b. This makes the wording consistent with the words in the next sentence, “may proceed to exclude.”

14. In **Appendix 8.3**, in the second sentence of the 6th paragraph, change the word “should” to “shall” so that it reads: “. . . the consistory shall seek the advice of classis before acting to exclude . . .”

Grounds:

- a. Seeking the advice of classis is not optional.
- b. This makes the wording of the appendix consistent with the wording of Article 55.b.2. and Article 56 [depending on the disposition of part 12 of this overture.]

15. In **Appendix 8.3**, in the third sentence of the 6th paragraph, change the words “advised it to proceed” to “advised that it may proceed” so that it reads: “. . . if classis has previously advised that it may proceed to the second step . . .”

Grounds:

- a. This makes it clear that the classis is not instructing the consistory to proceed, but merely giving its advice that it may proceed.
- b. This makes the wording consistent with Article 56 [depending on the disposition of part 13 of this overture.]

16. In **Article 57**, change the word in the title from “Reconciliation” to “Restoration” so that it reads: “Article 57: The Restoration of a Member.”

Ground:

This makes the title of the article consistent with the text of the first sentence of the article.

17. In **Article 57**, add the word “Communicant” before the word “Member” in the title so that it reads: “Article 57: The Restoration of a Communicant Member” [depending on the disposition of part 16 of this overture.]

Ground:

This makes it clear that we are talking about a communicant member who is still a part of the church, in contrast to Article 58 and Article 60.

18. In **Article 57**, change “two neighboring churches” to “two neighboring consistories” so that it reads: “. . . be decided with the advice of two neighboring consistories of the classis.”

Ground:

This makes it clear that it is the consistory, not the congregation, which is being asked to provide its advice.

19. In **Article 57**, delete the words “of the classis” so that it reads: “. . . be decided with the advice of two neighboring consistories.”

Grounds:

- a. This makes the wording consistent with Article 61 [depending on the disposition of part 29 of this overture.]

- b. Deleting the words “of the classis” emphasizes that in the Church Order, classis is an assembly, not a geographical region.
20. In **Article 58**, change the title to “The Readmission of Disciplined Communicant Members”
Grounds:
a. This title will reflect the change suggested in the next part of this overture.
b. This title makes it parallel to Article 60 [depending on the disposition of part 26 of this overture.]
21. In **Article 58**, change the words “anyone who has been excommunicated” to “any former communicant member who has been excluded or excommunicated” so that it reads:
“Whenever any former communicant member who has been excluded or excommunicated desires to be reconciled to the church . . .”
Ground:
This wording reflects the two means by which discipline is exercised on a communicant member (Article 55.c. and 56), rather than just one (Article 55.c).
22. In **Article 58**, change the word “reinstated” to “readmitted” so that it reads: “. . . be publicly readmitted with the use . . .”
Ground:
This wording makes the language of the article consistent with the title.
23. In **Article 59**, change “members by baptism” to “baptized members” so that it reads:
“Mature baptized members . . .”
Grounds:
a. This wording makes the language of the article consistent with the title.
b. This makes the wording consistent with the first sentence of Article 43.
24. In **Article 59**, add the words “by the Consistory” after the word “excluded” so that it reads:
“. . . if they persist, shall be excluded by the Consistory from the church of Christ.”
Ground:
This makes the wording parallel to Article 55.A. “shall be suspended by the Consistory.”
25. In **Article 59**, change the wording of the last sentence to “The Consistory shall seek the advice of classis before proceeding to such exclusion.”
Ground:
This makes the wording parallel to Article 55.B.2.
26. In **Article 60**, change the title to read “The Readmission of Disciplined Baptized Members”
Ground:
This makes the wording parallel to the title of Article 58 [depending on the disposition of part 20 of this overture.]
27. In **Article 60**, make the following additions (in *italics*) and deletions (in ~~striketrough~~):
“~~Members by baptism who have been excluded from the church~~ *Whenever any former baptized member who has been excluded from the church and who later repent of their sin* desires to be reconciled to the church by way of penitence, *they* shall be ~~received again into the church~~ *readmitted only upon public profession of faith.*”
Ground:
This makes the wording consistent with the first sentence of Article 43 and Article 59 [depending on the disposition of part 21-23 of this overture.]

28. In **Article 61**, add the Oxford comma after the word “elder” so that it reads: “When a minister, elder, or deacon has committed . . .”

Ground:

This is proper place to use the Oxford comma.

29. In **Article 61**, change the words “the Consistories of two neighboring churches” to “two neighboring consistories” so that it reads: “. . . with the concurring advice of two neighboring consistories. Should he harden . . .”

Ground:

This make the wording consistent with Article 57 [depending on the disposition of part 18 of this overture.]

30. In **Article 62**, change the last word from “excommunication” to “church discipline” so that it reads: “. . . which in any other member of the church would occasion church discipline.”

Ground:

This wording makes reference to the process of church discipline, rather than just one possible outcome.

31. In **Article 63**, add the Oxford comma after the word “elders” so that it reads: “The ministers, elders, and deacons shall exercise mutual censure regularly . . .”

Ground:

This is proper place to use the Oxford comma.

32. In **Article 64**, change the words “at least two years” to “at least eighteen months” so that it reads: “. . . with whom they have not been able to communicate for at least eighteen months.”

Ground:

We believe that eighteen months is a sufficient time to pursue members with which there has been no meaningful contact.

33. In **Article 65**, change the word “Equality” to “Parity” in the title so that it reads: “Parity of Churches and Office-Bearers.”

Ground:

The word “parity,” meaning equality of position or value, better expresses the relationship between churches and office-bearers than the more general word “equality.”

34. In light of the proposed change to Article 65 (above), in **Article 24**, change the word “Equality” to “Parity” in the title so that it reads: “Article 24: Parity and Unity of Congregations.”

Ground:

The word “parity,” meaning equality of position or value, better expresses the relationship between churches than the more general word “equality.”

35. In **Article 24**, delete the words “and equal” in the first sentence so that it reads: “Although congregations are distinct and do not have dominion over each other . . .”

Grounds:

- a. The word “equal” is vague and can be confusing.
- b. The word “equal” is unnecessary due to the following words “do not have dominion over each other.”
- c. Nothing is lost by making this deletion.

36. In **Article 65**, change the word “churches” (twice) and “church” to “Consistories” and “Consistory” so that it reads [depending on the disposition of part 33 of this overture]:
“Article 65: Parity of Consistories and Office-Bearers
No Consistory shall in any way lord it over other Consistories, and no office-bearer shall lord it over other office-bearers.”

Ground:

Parity of churches as congregations was dealt with in Article 24. This article deals specifically with the parity of the office-bearers, corporately and individually, to each other.

The following recommendations come from previous divisions of the Church Order.

37. In **Article 8**, add the words “delegates to” before the words “the classis” so that it reads: “without an examination conducted to the satisfaction of the delegates to the classis, according to the regulations . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording parallel to Article 6.

38. In **Article 8**, change the last sentence to read: “. . . whereupon the classis shall declare him eligible to be called by the sponsoring Consistory.”

Ground:

This wording also makes the article consistent with Appendix 5.2.d. which says, “Upon sustaining the colloquium doctum, the classis shall declare the minister eligible to be called by the sponsoring Consistory . . .”

39. In **Article 4**, delete the words “a meeting of the” (three times) so that it reads: “. . . which shall arrange for his examination at a classis of which his Consistory is a participant . . . until he has sustained an examination at this classis, in the presence of his Consistory . . . Upon sustaining this exam in the presence of his Consistory and with the concurring advice of the delegates to this classis . . .”

Ground:

By definition in the Church Order, classis is a meeting (cf. Article 16 and 26), making the words “meeting of” redundant and unnecessary.

40. In **Article 26**, delete the word “meeting” in the first sentence so that it reads: “. . . to meet at a time and place determined at the previous classis, within the next twelve months.”

Ground:

By definition in the Church Order, classis is a meeting (cf. Article 16), making the word “meeting” redundant and unnecessary.

41. In **Article 26**, change the word “meet” to “convene” in the second sentence so that it reads: “. . . deem it necessary that a classis convene earlier than the regular time determined . . .”

Ground:

Since classis is a meeting, the word “convene” is a more accurate description of what the article allows to happen.

42. In **Article 9**, delete the word “supervising” so that it reads: “. . . upon approval by his council with the concurring advice of classis.”

Ground:

There is only one type of Council in the Church Order. It is the one that provides supervision, making the word “supervising” unnecessary.

43. In **Articles 12 and 41**, change the words “confessing members” to “communicant members” so that they read: “Only male communicant members who meet the biblical requirements for office . . .” and “. . . signified and sealed to the children of communicant members in good standing . . .”

Grounds:

- a. This wording would be consistent with Article 55 and the current wording of Article 44.
 - b. The wording would be consistent with Article 57 and 58 [depending on the disposition of parts 17, 20-21 of this overture.]
 - c. This language would be consistent with the language proposed in another overture dealing with Article 42 and 44, should it be adopted.
 - d. We have found that using the term “communicant” to refer to a member’s status rather than “confessing” has helped us keep the categories straight, especially when it comes to receiving new members.
44. In **Article 15**, change the words “shall ordinarily meet every month” to “shall ordinarily meet at least once a month” in the last sentence so that it reads: “The deacons shall ordinarily meet at least once a month to transact the business . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording parallel to the wording in Article 21 regarding the meeting of the Consistory.

45. In **Article 40**, change the title from “Catechetical Preaching” to “Confessional Preaching.”

Ground:

The article itself makes reference to preaching the word as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity, not just the Heidelberg Catechism (although the catechism does receive special attention). This title more accurately reflects the full content of the article.

46. In **Article 22**, change the word “congregation” to “church” so that it reads: “When a church is organized within the federation . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording of the article correspond to the wording of the title of the article.

47. In **Article 9**, change the title to “The Term of Service.”

Ground:

This fits more consistently with other titles in the Church Order where the title is more generic and the article more specific.

48. In **Article 26** and **Article 28**, add the article “The” to the title so that it reads: “The Classis” and “The Synod.”

Ground:

This makes the titles parallel to articles 21 and 23, “The Consistory” and “The Council.”

49. In **Article 32**, delete the words “and sacraments” in the third sentence so that it reads: “. . . being declared a minister of the Word among the United Reformed Churches . . .”

Ground:

This is the only instance in the ten uses of the phrase “minister of the Word” in the 66 articles of the Church Order, that the phrase “and sacraments” is added. This deletion makes this article consistent with the rest of the Church Order.

The following recommendation comes from the Appendices of the Church Order.

50. In **Appendix 1.3.1**, insert the Oxford comma after the word “Reformation,” add the word “and” before the words “URCNA Federational history” so that it reads, “Courses which cover the Ancient, Medieval, Reformation, and Modern Church, and URCNA Federational history.

Grounds:

- a. This is the proper place to use the Oxford comma.
- b. This makes the article parallel with the use of “and” before the end of a series in 1.3, 2.3, and 4.1.

51. In **Appendix 2.2.b**, change the words “and the successful completion of the exam will be certified to the other Consistories of the federation” to “who must make known that the licentiate has sustained his licensure exam.”

Ground:

This wording is consistent with Appendix 3.2.c.

52. In **Appendix 2.3.b.**, change the words so that it reads: “The oral exam should investigate the following specific areas:”

Ground:

This wording is consistent with Appendix 3.3.b., Appendix 4.3, and Appendix 5.3.

53. In **Appendix 3.2.a**, change the words “request a meeting of classis for this exam” to “invite classis to participate in a candidacy exam” so that it reads: “The prospective candidate’s Consistory must invite classis to participate in a candidacy exam.”

Ground:

This makes the wording parallel to Appendix 4.2.b and Appendix 5.2.a.

54. In **Appendix 4.2.a**, delete the words “Exceptional case,” add the words “shall ordinarily” before the words “be waived,” and change the word “conducting” to “hearing” so that it reads: “a. If the ordination exam would occur in the same classis in which the candidacy exam was sustained, then the ordination exam shall ordinarily be waived by the delegates hearing the candidacy exam.”

Ground:

This makes the article consistent with wording and intent of Appendix 3.2.e.

55. In **Appendix 4.2.a.**, add this final sentence, “This shall apply to both a fully or partially sustained exam.”

Ground:

This makes clear that the provision for waiving the ordination exam applies to either situation.

56. In **Appendix 4.3.(3)**, delete the words “concerning” and “prospective” so that it reads: “. . . the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, the candidate’s willingness to subscribe to them . . .”

Grounds:

- a. This makes the wording parallel to Appendix 3.3.(4).
- b. This appendix is about an ordination exam for a candidate, not a prospective candidate.

57. In **Appendix 5.1.**, change the words “the examinee” to “the minister to be examined” so that it reads: “one from the minister to be examined and one from the sponsoring Consistory.”

Grounds:

- a. Throughout the appendices, we refer to men in their current state when being examined (“prospective candidate” in Appendix 3 and “candidate” in Appendix 4). This continues that practice, since the man being examined is currently a minister.
- b. Including the word “to be examined” avoids the possible confusion of whether this is referring to the minister to be examined, or the minister of the sponsoring Consistory.

58. In **Appendix 5.2.a.**, change the word “calling” to “sponsoring” so that it reads: “The sponsoring Consistory must invite classis . . .”

Ground:

This makes the wording consistent with 5.1, 5.2.b., and 5.2.d.

59. In **Appendix 5.2.b.**, change the word “examinee” to “minister” so that it reads: “The minister is to preach a sermon . . .”

Ground:

Throughout the appendices, we refer to men in their current state when being examined (“prospective candidate” in Appendix 3 and “candidate” in Appendix 4). This continues that practice, since the man being examined is currently a minister.

60. In **Appendix 5.2.1 (second option)**, change the word “examinee” to “minister to be examined,” the word “examinee’s” to “minister’s,” and “recommending” to “sponsoring” so that it reads: “. . . one from the minister to be examined, one from the minister’s Consistory, and one from the Sponsoring Consistory.”

Grounds:

- a. Throughout the appendices, we refer to men in their current state when being examined (“prospective candidate” in Appendix 3 and “candidate” in Appendix 4). This continues that practice, since the man being examined is currently a minister.
- b. The use of the word “sponsoring” makes this consistent with 5.1, 5.2.b., and 5.2.d.

61. In **Appendix 5.2a. and b. (second option)**, change the word “recommending” to “sponsoring.”

Ground:

This makes the article internally consistent.

62. In **Appendix 5.3.(3)**, delete the words “concerning” and change the words “prospective candidate’s” to “minister’s” so that it reads: “. . . the history and content of the Three Forms of Unity, the minister’s willingness to subscribe to them . . .”

Grounds:

- a. This makes the wording parallel to Appendix 3.3.(4).
- b. This appendix is about a colloquium doctum for a minister, not a prospective candidate.

63. In **Appendix 4.2.e.**, **Appendix 5.2.d.**, and **Appendix 5.2.c. (second option)**, delete the words “and sacraments” so that it reads: “a minister of the Word among the United Reformed Churches.”

Grounds:

- a. The title given to a minister in nine of ten uses of the term in the Church Order (ten of ten, of ten, depending on the disposition of part 49 of this overture) do not include these words.
 - b. The usage in the appendices of the Church Order should be consistent with the usage within the Church Order proper.
64. We recommend that the following capitalization guide be followed throughout the Church Order and the Appendices.
- A. The following words will be capitalized:
Consistory, Classis, Synod, Council, Diaconate (if used in the future), Church Order, Lord’s Supper, Word (in the phrase “minister of the Word”).
 - B. The following words will not be capitalized (unless required by the context, e.g. in the title of an article; beginning a sentence; in a combination like Church Order):
minister, elder, deacon, office-bearer, chairman, clerk, church (when used independently), federation, baptism.

Grounds:

- a. With regard to the first 3 capitalized words, they are names of assemblies (like the House of Representatives, the Senate, the Supreme Court, and Parliament) and therefore should be capitalized. The fourth and fifth terms are not assemblies, but are meetings of office-bearers and so for consistency should be capitalized. The sixth, seventh, and eighth terms are capitalized in common practice.
- b. Consistency aids in reading and comprehension.

Classis Southwest U.S.

Rev. Michael Spotts, Stated Clerk