

Advisory Committee 2, Synodical Services II, Rev. John Lee reporting, presents the following:

I. Response to Overture 19: Amend Church Order to Include Prayer in Description of Ministerial Calling

A. Materials

Overture 19, pp. 373-75

B. Recommendation

That synod accede to Overture 19 and present the proposed changes to Church Order Art. 11, 12-a, and 25-b1 to Synod 2027 for ratification.

Article 11

The calling of a minister of the Word is to be devoted to prayer, to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and equip the members so that the church of Jesus Christ may be built up.

Article 12-a

a. A minister of the Word serving as pastor of a congregation shall pray, preach the Word, administer the sacraments, conduct public worship services, catechize the youth, and train members for Christian service. The minister, with other officebearers, shall supervise the congregation and fellow officebearers, exercise admonition and discipline, see to it that everything is done decently and in order, exercise pastoral care over the congregation, and engage in and promote the work of evangelism and diaconal outreach.

Article 25-b

b. The elders, with the minister(s), shall pray for the congregation, shall oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow officebearers, shall provide counsel and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, shall participate in and promote evangelism, and shall defend the faith. As shepherds of the church, they shall encourage and support the members in their Christian life. The elders also shall nurture in the congregation grateful and obedient participation in the Lord's Supper through encouragement, instruction, and accountability.

Grounds:

a. Biblical precedent

In the beginning of the life of the church, when the disciples were increasingly pressured from busier ministry, they focused on their responsibilities: they devoted themselves "to prayer and the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). It is the calling of pastors and leaders today to do the same.

b. Historical precedent

The original Dort Church Order, Article 16, used in the CRC before 1965, included prayer as part of the description of the calling and responsibility of the minister:

The office of the Minister is to continue in prayer and in the ministry of the Word, to dispense the Sacraments, to watch over his brethren, the Elders and Deacons, as well and the Congregation, and finally, with the Elders, to exercise church discipline and to see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.

c. Pastoral expectation

The primacy of prayer has been an expectation for pastors in the ordination forms for the minister of the Word.

The 1959 ordination form states:

It is the office of the ministers publicly to call upon the Name of God in behalf of the whole congregation; for what the apostles say in Acts 6:4, "We will continue steadfastly in prayer, and in the ministry of the word," these pastors have in common with the apostles; to which St. Paul alludes what he speaks thus to Timothy: I exhort therefore, first of all, that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and all that are in high place; that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and gravity (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

The Form for the Ordination/Installation of Ministers (1986) states:

In all this work, the minister proclaims, explains, and applies Holy Scripture in order to gather in and build up the members of the church of Jesus Christ. For this work, the minister devotes himself to the ministry of prayer, joining all Christians in confession, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

II. Response to Overture 22: Revise Church Order Language and Process for Tracking Membership

A. Materials

Overture 22, pp. 378-81

B. Recommendation

That synod not accede to Overture 22.

Grounds:

1. We appreciate Overture 22's emphasis on the covenantal nature of membership and recognize confusion around the word "lapse" in relation to our ecclesiology, increasingly ecumenical contexts, and changing cultural understanding of membership. This overture,

however, proposes a potentially problematic term “archive”. Covenantal membership *papers* can be “archived.” Covenantal memberships cannot.

2. The overture presents an unhelpful dichotomy between relationship and polity. Good polity is not opposed to healthy relationships; it supports them.
3. While the presented case studies are helpful, they point to the need for clearer communication from councils, not necessarily changed verbiage.
4. The overture replaces the clarity and mutual accountability of a two-year time frame with the uncertain burden that a council must have “made every good faith effort to establish communication with the person.” Such a subjective standard could increase, not decrease confusion for councils in tracking membership.