

## Church Order II

Chair: Cara DeHaan  
Reporter: Robert Boersma

### Overtures

#### *I. Recommendation*

- A. That synod add the following to the Supplement of Church Order Article 5, Section B:
1. “3. The officebearer is expected to submit to the church’s confessions and judgments and must not teach, disciple, care, or counsel against the doctrine for which they are filing a Gravamen.”
  2. “4. The Gravamen will be revisited yearly by the council (from date of filing) so that the officebearer may both (1) continue to serve in faithful ways—including, but not limited to delegation to larger assemblies—and (2) work actively towards full re-alignment with the confessions.

#### *Grounds:*

1. We are, and wish to remain, a confessional denomination. This recommendation fosters a strengthened commitment to the confessions, because it requires that subscribers filing a Gravamen set aside their difficulty for the sake of the larger body.
2. Since its establishment, the Gravamen process has served our denomination well, but as of late, some confusion around this process may have led to a misuse of this process. This recommendation provides clarification while assuming good intent from the subscriber.
3. Church Order articulates a balance between local authority and communal accountability (Article 27). This recommendation upholds the “original” authority of the local council (Article 27a) to provide oversight of the life and doctrine of officebearers.
4. Scripture encourages us to continue to grow and learn (2 Peter 3:18, Philippians 1:9, Proverbs 1:5). Similarly, our Reformation heritage encourages us to continually be reformed by the Spirit of God through the Word. This recommendation thus appropriately allows for humble wondering and doctrinal wrestling, within the accountability structures of council, classis, and synod. “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known” (1 Corinthians 13:11-12).
5. Jesus declares, “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). This recommendation clarifies our accountability to one another without placing an undue burden on officebearers. This “easy yoke” facilitates our efforts to

welcome and use the leadership gifts of those who join our churches from other faith traditions and through evangelism.

6. As Classis Holland notes in Communication #3,

The Covenant for Officebearers asks two things of someone with a confessional difficulty: (1) to present it “in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel,” and (2) to “promise to submit to the church’s judgment and authority.” Notice what it does not ask—namely, to agree with the church’s judgment, but rather to submit to it. As we read it, this should allow someone with a private disagreement to serve, so long as (1) they will not teach, disciple, care, or counsel against the church’s teaching, and (2) if called upon in private or public, they will teach the church’s doctrine and not their own private belief. If churches will not allow this—that is, if they refuse a priori to grant a confessional-difficulty gravamen in this area of doctrine and teaching, even if the officebearer submits to the church’s judgment and authority, as expected in the Covenant for Officebearers—then this seems to us abusive in its own right, and an abject failure to humbly and patiently “bear with one another in love” (Eph. 4:3) and to “pursue what makes for peace” (Rom. 14:19). If a provision exists in the Church Order for a confessional difficulty, then that provision should be available regardless of the difficulty, at the judgment and discretion of the local church in consultation with the officebearer. (Agenda for Synod 2023, p. 605)

B. That synod consider this our response to Overtures 49, 50, 51, 53, 54, 55, 58, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67.

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