

I. Introduction

Over the years, various synods of the Christian Reformed Church have debated the role of deacons in the ministry of the church and have questioned whether the structures of the church are adequate to enable a flourishing diaconate. In particular, the question has frequently been raised whether deacons ought to participate in the major assemblies of the church. This question was raised most recently by Classis Grandville when they sent an overture to Synod 2010, requesting synod to establish a task force to propose changes to relevant Church Order articles which would allow for an expanded role for deacons and a revitalized, more robust diaconate that is better able to meet the challenges of our hurting world.

Synod recognized the urgency of that request and appointed a task force with the following mandate:

That synod instruct the Board of Trustees to appoint a task force to review the articles of the Church Order relating to the office of deacon at the church and major assemblies, as well as recommend resources that encourage revitalization of the diaconate and its role in the community. The intent of the review would be to encourage, empower, and educate churches and broader assemblies to structure their diaconal ministry in ways that

- allow for effective coordination of ministry efforts that transform the community and the church, as members minister in and with their community. This harnesses “God gifts” in the community for community benefit. The gifts of churches and their members, as well as the gifts lying dormant in the community, need to be stewardly. Church resources can be leveraged in amazing ways if they harness latent community gifts. Helping neighbors steward their resources is another pathway to heart change, significant living, opening conversations, and relationships that draw people to Jesus as Savior, Redeemer, and King.
- select leadership based on gifts commensurate with the office and vision for ministry.
- lead church members to exercise their gifts and so enhance their own faith walk as they minister with community, nation, and world.
- establish terms of deacon tenure that provide for consistent ministry oversight, implementation, and coordination.
- address the place and role of deacons at the broader assemblies.

Grounds:

- a. The current structure and tradition do not address the ministry context or the expectations of the equality of office established in Church Order Article 2.
- b. The mandate in the charge to deacons is difficult to fulfill given the current language in the Church Order.
- c. Past efforts to address this (i.e., asking for stronger classical diaconal committees) have not resulted in churches being the agents of transformation in their communities.

(Acts of Synod 2010, p. 829)

It is important to recognize what the task force was *not* mandated to do, and that is to offer biblical, theological, and historical reasons for permitting the seating of deacons at major assemblies. Those arguments have been made frequently and persuasively in the past, but we were not asked to rehearse those arguments again, even though we learned a great deal from them and include a historical synopsis in our report. Synod 2010 assumed the legitimacy of the argument to permit deacons at major assemblies and

instructed the task force to review the relevant Church Order articles and propose such changes to enable greater participation.

The task force met several times throughout 2011 and 2012 to pursue its mandate. At our first meeting, we adopted the name *Diakonia Remixed*. *Diakonia* is Greek for *service* and a *remix* is a fresh reformulation of an original version. The name therefore reflects the task force's strong desire to see a reinvigorated diaconal ministry in the CRC.

In pursuit of that end the task force took up the following tasks:

- examined the Bible's teaching about *diakonia*.
- learned about the Church Order and its commentaries.
- articulated a set of guiding principles that could shape our proposals and guide synod's deliberations.
- reviewed the history of CRC study committees and synodical decisions about the role of deacons at major assemblies.
- gauged the mind of the church by conducting a comprehensive on-line survey, using the services of the Calvin College Center for Social Research.
- began to gather resources that can enrich the church's diaconal ministry at multiple levels and in a variety of contexts.
- reviewed various related materials such as liturgical forms and leadership guides.

To assist us in our task, the task force invited a number of people from across the denomination to serve as advisers to the task force. They reviewed draft documents, promoted the survey, participated in focus group activities, and offered helpful feedback as we proceeded. The task force also created a public website (www.crcna.org/diakonia) to report progress on its work and an internal website that functioned as a discussion forum and bulletin board for a variety of resources.

The outcome of our work is this report. It consists of background materials (with links to additional online resources for further study), a set of guiding principles, a cluster of recommendations to revise articles of the Church Order to reflect the guiding principles and to allow the participation of deacons at the church's major assemblies, proposals for redrafting relevant liturgical and church educational materials, and suggestions for ways to resource a "Re-imagined Diaconate."

The central theological and ecclesiastical conviction that has guided our work is that the church does not simply *have* deacons but is by its very nature and calling a diaconate—that is, a community created by the triune God to be a servant people in the world. Rather than starting with the story of the early church in Acts 6, which is commonly (but erroneously) thought of as definitive for the inauguration of the diaconate, the task force began with Ephesians 4:11-13, where the apostle Paul writes,

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service [*diakonia*], 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.

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright translates verse 12a this way: “Their job is to give God’s people the equipment they need for their work of service” (in *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters*, p. 46).

Ephesians teaches a larger lesson than can be found in Acts 6, namely that *diakonia*, as the work of service that restores *shalom*, is not confined to a particular office but belongs to the church as a whole. The calling of deacons is not to perform that service on behalf of the church, but rather to equip, empower, and enable the whole church to live out its own diaconal calling. This important principle echoes the findings of many other study committees, all of whom have come to similar conclusions.

The substantive core of our report is the cluster of recommendations to revise the Church Order to express a greater sense of the parity of the offices and to allow for diaconal representation at the major assemblies. We propose several other revisions as well, many of which are for the sake of clarity and consistency with the guiding principles we articulate below.

II. Research conducted

A. *The survey*

The 2010 overture from Classis Grandville stated that “most churches, in the context of ministry needs today, struggle with using the office of deacon as effectively as they would hope. Part of the struggle is one of selection. The majority of deacons at any given point in time are in their first term in office. Despite the 1973 report ‘The Nature of Ecclesiastical Office’ that established the equality of all offices, deacons are often still perceived as ‘elders in training’” (*Agenda for Synod 2010*, p. 690). The overture also claims that “the local diaconate does not have the structure and support needed to carry out the charge it has been given” (p. 691). Further, the overture recognizes the rich potential of the diaconate to be an agent of community transformation but laments that the potential remains largely unfulfilled.

The task force wished to check the assumptions made in the overture and recruited the services of the Center for Social Research at Calvin College to conduct a survey that would paint a portrait of the current state of diaconal affairs in the CRC. We asked questions about church members’ perceptions of deacons and about their relative satisfaction with the work deacons performed in the church, in the community, and globally. We asked church members to reflect on the relative effectiveness of deacons in terms of ministries of mercy and benevolence, those of community transformation, and those of advocacy and justice ministries. We inquired about the adequacy of training for deacons, about their role as leaders and equippers of others to engage in ministries to the community.

The data that was returned is rich and complex. The report on the survey results, available online, is worth reading in its entirety but is too lengthy to be included here. The following brief summary will have to suffice: in general the task force discovered that the assumptions of Classis Grandville are largely true, and this was affirmed repeatedly by our advisers. The simpler tasks of mercy and benevolence—setting offering schedules, meeting benevolence needs within the congregation, receiving offerings for local and national needs—were perceived by many as the task that deacons did most frequently and at which they were most competent. As the tasks became

more complex and challenging, moving from benevolence to community engagement through to justice advocacy, the frequency of diaconal involvement and the perceptions of deacons' competence to perform those tasks, or to lead others in performing them, decreased radically. So, for example, while the vast majority of deacons do very well at setting the offering schedule, hardly any were actively pursuing better housing policies in their communities or seeking restorative justice.

Many survey respondents also believed that the work of deacons, their leadership potential, and the overall ministries of the church would be enhanced by representation of deacons at classis meetings and synod.

To access a complete summary of survey results, please visit www.crcna.org/pages/diakonia_survey.cfm.

B. Diaconal committees

Another part of our research included a review of diaconal committees because diaconal committees are mandated by the Church Order as a helpful way for churches to engage in ministries of mercy that are beyond the scope of individual congregations. Article 75-b states:

The classes shall, whenever necessary, assist the churches in their ministry of mercy. The classes themselves may perform this ministry when it is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches. To administer this task, each classis shall have a classical diaconal committee.

How effective are classical diaconal committees (CDCs)? How many are there, and how active are they? What are the challenges they face, and could those challenges be met by other structural innovations in the church? The following is a summary of what the task force learned about CDCs. It should be noted that our study of diaconal committees was not exhaustive, thus the following may not completely represent the status of diaconal committees in the CRCNA.

1. Canadian CDCs

- a. **Diaconal Ministries Canada** supports and encourages twelve classes (six of which have active diaconal conferences and six of which do not). It is involved in and encourages community and justice ministries as well as deacon resources and training.
- b. **CDC, Classis Toronto** began to lose purpose a few years ago. It asked classis to form a classis committee in order to give a structure within which to work together as deacons. This was formed in 2009 but has not gone particularly well. The committee has done very little. There is talk of recommending that this committee be disbanded.
- c. **CDC, Classis Huron**—During the 1980s the conference was primarily involved in diaconal training and project stimulation among the churches in classis. They were a self-governing body, funded through dues from diaconates. In the early 1990s, the role of the conference/committee shifted to a training role for deacons, under the governance of classis. Currently the deacons get together once or twice a year so that they can hear each other's stories. They have no formal board.
- d. **Northern Alberta Diaconal Conference** has a part-time coordinator and is very active.

2. Current U.S. CDCs

- a. **Christian Service Ministries** (Chicago South) had a Diaconal Task Force for quite a few years. After a while, it seemed that it was losing momentum, and it dissolved. Several deacons in the area felt it was necessary to still have an organization focused on the needs of lay leaders in the church. So in February 2002, Christian Service Ministries was formed. It is funded by Classis Chicago South and has a part-time coordinator. They focus on training for pastors, elders, deacons, and lay leaders; providing resources; and networking opportunities.
- b. **Diaconal Ministries** (Muskegon, Mich.) was established in the 1980s and currently has a full-time ministry coordinator who oversees service committees in three areas of the classis which are involved in direct service ministries. Classis pays the coordinator's salary, and the ministries are funded by the churches and some grants.
- c. **Holland Deacons' Conference** (Holland, Mich.) has functioned for over forty years. It has a very strong board and executive team and paid, full-time staff. It oversees many community ministries, including My Brother's and My Sister's House (residential housing for adults with intellectual disabilities). It is very independent of classis yet cooperates with classis. Holland Deacons' Conference is primarily funded by churches, individuals, businesses, and foundations. Classis Holland also has a part-time ministries coordinator.
- d. **Kalamazoo Deacons' Conference** (Kalamazoo, Mich.) is nearly forty years old and was more closely tied to the classis as a diaconal committee but now is serving more independently as a diaconal arm of many evangelical churches to the inner city of Kalamazoo. It has become more of a nonprofit organization, even though their name does not suggest this. It has full-time, paid staff and does both relief and individual development.
- e. **Siouxland Deacons Conference** (Northwest Iowa) is a joint ministry between Classis Iakota and Classis Heartland. Initially they focused on projects and education and are now moving toward community development. Their staff has been full time since the outset. Mr. Rick Droog, the current coordinator, says they are seen as the visionaries/planners who are willing to work with individual churches to help them do ministry. They are very much connected to the classes and receive approximately half of their funding from them. They do both relief and individual development.

3. Current U.S. nonprofits

- a. **Starfish Ministries** (Lake Superior; Eastern Minnesota) began as a nonprofit organization from the outset. The dream of those who organized it was to do ministry in the Twin Cities area that focused on reaching people in poverty. Its staff has always been full time. It is supported by classis at about 20 to 25 percent of its budget since it began in 1995, even though its ministry is connected to less than one-third of the churches in classis. There are other classis-supported ministries in

other areas of the classis, so most are benefitting from classis support. Starfish Ministries does individual development and is moving toward more community development.

- b. **Volunteers in Action** (Rocky Mountain) has moved more toward being a nonprofit organization but continues to function as a CDC for Classis Rocky Mountain. It does relief as well as individual improvement programs and has always had full-time, paid staff.
- c. **Volunteers in Service (VIS)** (Thornapple Valley, Grand Rapids East, Grand Rapids North, Grand Rapids South, and Grandville) started in 1986 as a ministry of the five classes and their CDCs. The board was made up of a delegate from each conference along with CRC at-large members. After the folding of each of the CDCs by the late 1990s, VIS became its own nonprofit organization and still sought board members from churches in each of the five classes and other denominations. Each classis continued financial support, but VIS began seeking more diverse funding streams. It has full-time paid staff. They do individual development and diaconate development/training work. *Note:* Classis Grand Rapids East has a part-time ministry coordinator (as of September 2009) and Classis Grand Rapids South has had a part-time diaconal coordinator for the past ten years, but in 2011 VIS was contracted by Classis Grand Rapids South to do diaconal development with its nineteen churches.
- d. **Northeast Community Transformation (NECT)** (Atlantic Northeast, Hackensack, Hudson) incorporated in 2007 and serves as a holistic ministry team of classical ministries. Prior to NECT's incorporation, Classes Hudson and Hackensack supported a regional diaconal team for decades. Over the years, the team had many names (including the Mid-Atlantic Diaconal Conference, Mid-Atlantic Social Justice Committee, and Mid-Atlantic Mercy Ministries, to name a few). The primary ministry of the team was coordination of a Men's Shelter Ministry, which NECT continues today.
- e. **Imagine NW!** coaches, consults, supports, networks, trains, advocates, and prays for a growing array of partnership groups throughout Oregon, Washington, and Alaska, training communities to use the Asset-Based Community Development model.

4. Discontinued U.S. CDCs

- a. **Pella Diaconal Conference** (Central Plains) was joined with the Home Missions committee of that classis in an attempt to combine word and deed. It did not work the way organizers had hoped. This classis has a wide geographic footprint and it became a ministry only in the Pella area, which made it difficult for other churches to support. It has been inactive for ten years or more. Rev. Jack Gray, who served as the stated clerk for Classis Pella, said they waited for the churches to *want* a diaconal conference before they began a new one, but the grassroots support never materialized.

- b. **Western Diaconal Conference** (Lake Superior; Western Minnesota) was focused on projects. Its last focus was a Friendship ministry in Willmar, Minn. Its staff was always part-time. It lasted about five years and was funded by classis and the local churches.
- c. **Tri-city Ministries Committee** (Muskegon) was functioning in the 1990s with a paid staff, serving the three communities within Classis Muskegon. We are uncertain of its status now.

5. Conclusions

In Canada, Diaconal Ministries Canada (DMC) provides leadership and resources for deacons in all classes in Canada, whether they have a CDC or not. They encourage classes and individual churches to get involved in diaconal work and provide resources and training.

In the United States, some CDCs have remained *committees* that assist the churches in their classes in the area of mercy ministries. In other cases, they have become separate nonprofit organizations (NPOs) with their own missions. Some of these NPOs have stayed connected to the classes, and others have become disconnected. Some classes have never had a CDC.

Some of the reasons given for why CDCs have struggled, in no particular order of importance, include the following:

- a. Lack of support and encouragement (financial and reporting) by classis and/or churches of classis.
- b. Competing existence of an NPO or DMC.
- c. Geography—congregations want to focus on their local setting and sense no mandate to consider a larger ministry.
- d. Varying capacities of lay leadership.
- e. No paid or only part-time staff.
- f. No clear, meaningful, and unified vision, mission, and purpose.
- g. Deacons not active at classis level of ministry planning and performance.

C. *References to the heart of diakonia in the CRC creeds, confessions, testimonies, and ecumenical faith declaration*

The task force thought it would be helpful to look beyond the Church Order to see how the church's diaconal role is described in our creeds and confessions. From the vantage point of a lay person, it seems that the oldest documents were primarily concerned with doctrinal and theological foundations that established the Reformed churches and distinguished them from others. They were less interested in guiding the church's missiology as a whole, and even less so the church's diaconal role.

It is not until we get to the Heidelberg Catechism that we gain a clearer understanding of the Reformed teachings in terms easily accessible to the lay person. The law, the creeds, the sacraments and the Lord's Prayer are explained in simple biblical terms and form a core of discipleship training that remains relevant and beautiful to this very day. Effort is made to help believers apply these core beliefs to daily heart motivations and summons to action. *Diakonia* begins to emerge as an intrinsic hardwiring of the heart—a source of inspiration or incentive.

The more recent *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* makes many references to both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment as these were spoken by Jesus to the early church. What follows is a very brief summary of the *diaconal* content of each document.

1. *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony*

From the Preamble through to the final section on the New Creation, the development of a diaconal heart in the life of a believer is threaded throughout the Contemporary Testimony. One of the greatest encouragements toward the maturing of that heart is in the section on the Mission of God's People. With reference to the words of Jesus himself in Matthew 25, the Contemporary Testimony (para. 41) states,

the church is sent with the gospel of the kingdom to call everyone to know and follow Christ. . . . The Spirit calls all members to embrace God's mission in their neighborhoods and in the world: to feed the hungry, bring water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and free the prisoner.

The testimony also teaches that, as God's people in new community, "the church is a gathering" equipped by the Spirit to live out "the ongoing story of God's reconciling love" and to work "for a world of justice and peace" (para. 39). That includes an active involvement in calling "on all governments to do public justice and to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals, groups, and institutions so that each may do their tasks." We are urged to "pledge ourselves to safeguard children and the elderly from abuse and exploitation, to bring justice to the poor and oppressed, and to promote the freedom to speak, work, worship, and associate" (para. 53). The Contemporary Testimony does not relegate that task to deacons, but assigns it to the whole church, clearly including every person who belongs to it.

The testimony concludes with a beautiful picture of the new creation, where God's "kingdom will fully come and the Lord will rule" (para. 55). As his people and by his grace, we can "live confidently, anticipating his coming, offering him our daily lives—our acts of kindness, our loyalty, and our love—knowing that he will weave even our sins and sorrows into his sovereign purpose. Come, Lord Jesus, come" (para. 57).

2. The Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed

It is impossible to read and believe these creeds without an awesome appreciation and gratitude for the work of God in creation, the gift of Jesus Christ in redemption, and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the present and future.

Diakonia in these creeds is expressed in "the communion of the saints" and "the forgiveness of sins," which, if truly lived out by every believer, would fill our churches and inevitably our world with hearts of mercy. While believers labor and look toward "the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting," our earthly labor could be described as a duty to use these gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of others.

3. The Heidelberg Catechism

As the writers of the catechism provide answers to questions related to the law, the creeds, the sacraments, and the Lord's Prayer, there is a con-

tinuous acknowledgment of intractable human sinfulness, the abundant grace of our Lord Jesus, and the ever-present strength of the Holy Spirit equipping us to live according to the desires of God. As much as it is clear that our works cannot earn us salvation, the motivations and actions of a diaconal heart will openly declare our love for God and his people. The assurance and confidence of our salvation should be the foundation on which a heart for the care for others is grown.

The comfort that “I am not my own” and that my Savior “makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live *for him*” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1, emphasis ours) should be enough to have us look at just *how* we live. What does that really mean? The catechism goes on to explain that all God wants of us is to love him with our *all*, and to love our neighbors as ourselves—a simple heart of *diakonia*.

“Because by faith I am a member of Christ,” and therefore called a Christian, “I am anointed . . . to strive with a free conscience against sin and the devil in this life” (Q&A 32).

The catechism’s explanation of the eighth commandment clearly describes a diaconal heart when it says “that I do whatever I can for my neighbor’s good, that I treat others as I would like them to treat me, and that I work faithfully so that I may share with those in need.”

4. The Canons of Dort

The Canons of Dort are statements of doctrine adopted by the Reformed Synod of Dort in 1618-19. That synod had an international dimension, since it was not only composed of the delegates of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands but also attended by twenty-seven representatives of foreign churches.

The Synod of Dort was held in view of the serious disturbance in the Reformed churches caused by the rise and spread of Arminianism. Arminius, a theological professor at the University of Leyden, and his followers departed from the Reformed faith in their teaching concerning five important points. They taught conditional election on the ground of foreseen faith, universal atonement, partial depravity, resistible grace, and the possibility of a lapse from grace. These views were rejected by the synod, and the opposite views were embodied in what are now called the Canons of Dort.

In these canons, the synod set forth the Reformed doctrine on these points, namely, unconditional election, particular atonement, total depravity, invincible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. Although this last point makes reference to the working out of one’s salvation and the incentive believers have toward thanksgiving and good works, there is little mention of the believer’s service to others in acts of justice, mercy, or love.

5. The Belgic Confession

Article 20 focuses on the justice and mercy of God in Christ but offers no expectation for humankind to do likewise. Article 24 delves into the sanctification of sinners and speaks briefly about the believer’s motivation for good works. Article 28 brings forth a clear statement in describing the obligation of church members that should resonate in the diaconal heart:

All people are obliged to join and unite with [the church], keeping the unity of the church by submitting to its instruction and discipline, by bending

their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and by serving to build up one another, according to the gifts God has given them as members of each other in the same body.

6. The Belhar Confession

The language of unity, reconciliation, and justice is woven throughout the Belhar, but the final section (4) most clearly articulates the heart of *diakonia*. For the most part the Belhar simply recites Scripture when it articulates this most compelling diaconal challenge to the church in the globalized 21st century—the challenge to seek justice for the poor and destitute.

We believe

- that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- that God calls the church to follow him in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
- that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
- that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger, helps orphans and widows and blocks the path of the ungodly;
- that for God pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their suffering;
- that God wishes to teach the church to do what is good and to seek the right . . . ;
- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

In summary, the task force observes that the historical confessions and the contemporary testimonies lead the church to a more fulsome self-understanding of her diaconal identity and mandate than is reflected in the current Church Order articles that pertain to the work of deacons.

D. A historical summary of synodical reports and decisions concerning the delegation of deacons to major assemblies

As mentioned above, Synod 2010 did not mandate the task force to make the biblical, theological, and historical case that deacons should participate in the major assemblies. Synod assumed the legitimacy of that argument, or at least believed it has been made adequately in the past to inform any future synod's deliberations. Ours is a *task force* after all and not a *study committee*, whose mandates are usually more comprehensive and whose recommendations generally require greater theoretical support. Still, we found it worthwhile to review the long and interesting history of the debate about deacons in the CRC. We detected, without surprise, that the trajectory of study committees and synodical decisions was moving toward seating deacons at synod until the women-in-office debate bumped it off course. Now that this debate is behind us and the Church Order has been amended accordingly, the way is clear to recapture the trajectory that was abandoned a few decades ago.

Many committees have studied the role of deacon and their presence at major assemblies in the CRC over the history of the denomination. Synodical reports have been both declined and (mostly) accepted, with varying degrees of action or change resulting from their recommendations. What follows is a brief summary of this history, and a full account can be found at www.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/diakonia/A%20Summary%20of%20Synodical%20Reports,%20October%202011.docx.

Overture 17 in the *Agenda of Synod 1980* includes an “interpretive history” which might also be considered helpful for the reader, especially the analysis on page 587. This can be found at www.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/diakonia/Overture%2017%20-%20Synod%201980.pdf.

The debate about seating deacons at the major assemblies of the CRCNA began in 1962 when Classis Chatham offered the ground that the office of deacon formed an integral part of the work of the church in carrying out a ministry of mercy. They stated that diaconal work is the work of Christ, and therefore the work of Christ’s church *as a whole*. Diaconal ministry should therefore be kept within the jurisdiction and authority of the church and not be entrusted to conferences that have no ecclesiastical authority. The report stated that diaconal work had become more complex and therefore required the engagement and cooperation of the whole church. The overture was defeated on the grounds that “insufficient scriptural evidence has been adduced to warrant such a change in the Church Order” (*Acts of Synod 1962*, p. 95). Classis Chatham overtured synod again the following year, this time offering significant biblical and theological justifications. Synod decided to recommend that the churches study this matter further because “the church is not ready for this innovation at the present time” (*Acts of Synod 1963*, p. 116). A study committee was assembled and asked to report to Synod 1965; the report was presented to Synod 1966.

The 1966 report concluded that some change should be made to the present method of delegation to major assemblies, based on the following grounds (*Acts of Synod 1966*, p. 125):

1. biblical recognition of the authority of all ecclesiastical offices, including that of deacon;
2. the importance of the priestly aspect of the church’s ministry as represented primarily by the deacons;
3. the large number of matters considered at the major assemblies which are primarily the concern of deacons; and
4. the recognized principles of the equality and unity of the offices.

The report specifically recommended that “synod declare that, in the light of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, it judges that there are no lawful objections to the delegation of deacons to the major assemblies of the church” and that “synod decide that *one* minister, *one* elder, and also *one* deacon be delegated to classes and synods, and that these three office-bearers shall be delegated with identical mandates and credentials” (*Acts of Synod 1966*, pp. 126-27). The *Acts of Synod 1966* indicate that this report was referred back to the study committee to answer a series of five questions and was also referred back to the churches for input (p. 23).

In 1967 the committee resubmitted its report along with a summary of responses from the churches and answers to the questions posed in 1966.

The responses provided by the churches led to these three conclusions (*Acts of Synod 1967*, p. 247):

- Most recognized “the need for some type of delegation of deacons to major assemblies,” but “there was also a concurrent hesitation to adopt equal representation with identical mandates.”
- Concern was expressed “about the possibility of losing the distinctiveness of the offices.”
- Questions were raised about whether the nature of the major assemblies is “purely judicial and regulatory” or a form of “the church-in-action”—“deliberating upon, planning, and deciding its whole prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministry.”

The study committee offered comprehensive and substantial answers to all five questions posed by the previous synod. Nevertheless the advisory committee disagreed with their conclusions, and synod did not adopt the study committee’s recommendations. The advisory committee’s objections can be summed up as follows: the study committee failed to prove that “deacons by virtue of their office have authority to deal with all the matters that come before an ecclesiastical assembly”; it was not proved that “non-delegation of deacons to major assemblies does violence to the ‘unity and distinctiveness of the offices in Christ,’ or that this means that elders and ministers ‘lord it over’ deacons”; and the report tended toward “reducing the distinctiveness of the office of deacons” from that of elders (*Acts of Synod 1967*, p. 92).

In 1970 Classis Hamilton asked synod to study the question anew, and synod referred the request “to a study committee for a reevaluation of the decision of the Synod of 1967” (*Acts of Synod 1970*, p. 98). In 1972 the synodical study committee issued Report 32, offering both a majority and a minority report. The majority report dismissed the idea of seating deacons at major assemblies, saying that there were no sufficient biblical grounds for doing so and that arguments from the silence of Scripture (regarding deacons at major assemblies) deduced by previous committees were inconclusive. This report added that seating deacons at major assemblies would involve them in matters “outside the scope of their office”; that diaconal conferences would gain no authority “to implement decisions in the church”; and that CRWRC was functioning quite well without deacons at synod (*Acts of Synod 1972*, pp. 365-69).

The minority report helpfully pointed out that Synod 1967 on the one hand admitted “that the delegation of deacons is neither prohibited nor demanded by Scripture and the Reformed confessions,” but, on the other hand, decided not to proceed with delegation on the ground that the committee did not prove Scripture *demanded* such a delegation (p. 373). To clarify, the minority report stated, “If Scripture neither prohibits nor demands such delegation, then the fact that no scriptural basis was adduced to demand delegation cannot be used a ‘ground’ for denying the delegation of deacons” (p. 374).

This report clearly stated, in its conclusion,

Delegation of deacons to major assemblies will not immediately bring diaconal service into larger attention and interest throughout our churches. But if we recognize that the church is a united body, and that all of its work is interrelated; that the scope of the ministry of mercy has taken on large global dimensions in

our day; and that the very presence of deacons at major assemblies can serve to focus the attention of the church on the fact that our compassionate Savior wills that the work of mercy shall stand in the center of the full interest of the church; then the presence of deacons at major assemblies can be a step in the direction of honoring Christ more fully in his compassion and mercy. The church has a great responsibility to show the mercy of Christ both in, and to, our troubled world. Let deacons be involved at the level of decision making to project the image of compassion and mercy in the church to a sick and despairing world.

(Acts of Synod 1972, p. 381)

Synod 1972 had difficulty making a decision between these two reports but chose “not to move in the direction of delegating deacons to major assemblies at this time” while encouraging the churches “to continue giving constructive action to this matter” (p. 48).

Further reports in 1973 and 1975 and further dismissals or referrals back to classis led Classis Muskegon to decide in January 1978 to require that each member church send one minister, one elder, and one deacon to its classis meetings, who “shall convene together but then meet separately to discuss matters appropriate for that office.” This decision was appealed by Second CRC of Fremont, Michigan, and Synod 1978 upheld the appeal, dismissing the Muskegon initiative (*Acts of Synod 1978*, p. 115).

Noting no changes after the consideration of many reports on the issue, Richard R. De Ridder concluded in 1982 that “the time in which we live provides almost unlimited opportunities for the development of the office of deacon. It would be a severe loss to the church if the diaconal office is further subsumed under that of eldership” (*Delegation of Deacons to Classis and Synod: A Collation of Study Committee Reports, Overtures, and Decisions of Synods of the Christian Reformed Church 1861-1981*; this study is available at www.crna.org/site_uploads/uploads/diakonia/Delegation_DeRidder_Part1.pdf and www.crna.org/site_uploads/uploads/diakonia/Delegation_DeRidder_Part2.pdf).

Synod 1984 requested that the work of elders and deacons be more clearly distinguished to appease the conscience of those churches that were opposed to women in office. The *Agenda for Synod 1987* included a proposed plan for sending deacons to classis and requested “that synod not make a judgment concerning the delegation of deacons to synodical assemblies at this time” (pp. 398, 401). Synod 1987 approved all recommendations in that report (Report 31) except for those related to the delegation of deacons to classis.

In 1995, based on the experience of the Council of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada to which deacons were delegated and given the distinct emphasis on diaconal ministry in Canada, a report included in its recommendations the integration of deacons and diaconal ministries into the governance of the denomination. Specifically it was recommended (see *Agenda for Synod 1995*, p. 317)

- to revise Church Order Article 40-a to read that each council should delegate a minister, an elder, and a deacon to classis.
- to revise Church Order Article 45 to state that “each classis shall delegate one minister, one elder, and one deacon to the synod.”
- to appoint a study committee to work with “diaconal conferences and organizations to integrate their work, where desirable, into classical and synodical structures.”

Synod 1995 did not approve the recommendations (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 741).

In 1997 synod received an overture from Classis Muskegon requesting the addition of a supplement to Church Order Article 40-a that would permit a classis to seat deacons as delegates, “provided the classis approves of the delegation of deacons” to its assembly (*Agenda for Synod 1997*, p. 465). That year synod also received a communication from Classis Lake Erie that it had developed “a comprehensive classical vision and mission strategy statement” that led to a decision by all the churches in the classis to delegate “a pastor, an elder, and a deacon to all [of its] classis meetings” (p. 494). In response, Synod 1997 added the following supplement to Church Order Article 40-a (*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 621):

The council of each church shall delegate a deacon in addition to a minister and an elder, provided the classis approves of the delegation of deacons to its meetings. Deacons delegated to classis shall be given credentials identical to those given to ministers and elders. The gender of diaconal delegates to a classis shall be consistent with the decisions of that classis concerning the supplement to Article 3-a of the Church Order.

Since then, Synods 2007 and 2009 have included additional qualifications to Church Order Supplement, Article 40-a (see *Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 612; *Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 613).

III. Guiding principles

The grounds offered by Classis Grandville in 2010 suggest that there is a disconnect between Church Order articles and the church’s much richer self-understanding of its diaconal calling as these are articulated in the church’s testimonies and liturgical forms. The grounds also point to a need for the diaconal mission to be described in more complete, holistic, and robust terms that recognize both the intensified urgency of needs in our broken world, as well as the scope of the church’s giftedness as the Holy Spirit equips us to meet ever greater challenges.

The task force has undertaken a study of the biblical literature concerning the church’s mission as *diakonia* to the world, as well as a review of the lengthy history of the discussion within the CRC concerning the delegation of deacons to major assemblies. We also conducted a survey to gain a clearer understanding of the current level of diaconal engagement across the denomination, and the varieties of ways in which churches are organized for ministry. These sources have provided the task force with a number of insights that have guided our consideration of the Church Order and other related documents. The insights are the basis for the following guiding principles:

1. It is not simply the case that the church *has* deacons, but rather it is the case that the whole church *is itself called to diakonia*, which we understand as God-glorifying service that is rendered to the world in obedience to Christ. A key text is found in Ephesians 4:11-13:

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service [Greek: *diakonia*], 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.

The biblical teaching that elaborates just what those “works of service” are that lead to “unity in the faith,” “knowledge of the Son of God,” maturity, and “the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” is rich and vast and spans both testaments. Beginning in Genesis, with the summons to be in right relationship (*shalom*) with God and one another and to care for the creation; through the Old Testament calling of Israel to be constituted as a kind of “demonstration plot” among the nations, exemplifying the communal life of a holy people called to bring light and blessings to the nations; and on to the New Testament summons to follow Jesus into the world-renewing life of the kingdom, marked by both humble sacrificial service and radical neighbor love—the entire biblical narrative can be understood as an extended commentary of what it means to render service to God, others, and the whole creation. (A much fuller presentation of the theme of *diakonia* as found in the Bible can be found at www.crcna.org/site_uploads/uploads/diakonia/Diakonia%20Remixed%20Biblical%20Perspective.doc.)

2. For that reason, *diakonia* cannot be reduced to simple acts of charity and the distribution of alms (as suggested by the use of Acts 6 in the form for ordination) but includes a much broader and richer mandate. The Contemporary Testimony articulates a broad and comprehensive mission for the church as a people gathered “to live out the story of God’s reconciling love . . . working for a world of justice and peace.” The scope of the Testimony’s vision for the church includes creation care, service to the poor, prayerful political participation, peacemaking, advocacy, economic stewardship, and education for prophetic watchfulness over our world. The Belhar Confession also adds heft when it reminds us that “the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream”; and “that the church as the possession of God must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.” The church must embrace a broad description of mission as urged by both the Contemporary Testimony and the Belhar Confession. As the form for the ordination of deacons suggests, deacons are called to lead the church in living out this high calling in all of its holistic multidimensionality, “fer-
vently desiring to give life the shape of things to come.” Deacons are not called simply to perform acts of service *on behalf of the church* but to lead the whole church in faithful obedience to its multifaceted participation in the mission of God.
3. The church’s role in society is described thus not only in terms of mercy but also in terms of justice, reconciliation, and peacemaking. As Micah 6:8 reminds us, these two rich biblical ideas, justice and mercy, belong together, for justice is the public enactment of the mercy of God. Mercy, spoken of by itself, can often be misunderstood simply as charity, but coupled with justice, together they speak to the healing of relationships and the restoration of *shalom*. In terms of diaconal outreach to the poor,

mercy is analogous to relief that addresses immediate needs which are often symptomatic of deeper problems; but justice seeks to understand and address the root causes of poverty. The form for ordination charges deacons to “be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and to be sensitive counselors to the victims of such evils.” For this reason the task force is recommending several changes in the language of the articles of the Church Order to reflect that more comprehensive understanding of *diakonia* and to render it more consistent with the language of the Contemporary Testimony, the Belhar Confession, and the forms for ordination. We also propose amending the current job description for deacons and other related denominational materials to be consistent with the Church Order.

4. The task force is guided by the “principle of parity” between the offices as this is stated in Church Order Article 2. We have been persuaded by numerous historical reports to multiple synods that the principle of parity is best honored when deacons are also appointed as delegates to serve in the major assemblies of the church. We observe that several study committees over the years have recommended the delegation of deacons to major assemblies. Synods have often concurred that the delegation of deacons is “neither prohibited nor demanded by Scripture and the Reformed confessions,” but have nevertheless consistently refrained from adopting recommendations that derive from that fact. The history of this discussion in the church is lengthy (see section II, D of this report) and, as has been noted previously, it is not within the mandate of the task force to make the argument again. Nevertheless the task force has proceeded with recommendations to amend the Church Order based on the precedent set in 1997 when synod approved delegation of deacons to classis by adding the following supplement to Church Order Article 40-a:

The council of each church shall delegate a deacon in addition to a minister and an elder, provided the classis approves of the delegation of deacons to its meetings. Deacons delegated to classis shall be given credentials identical to those given to ministers and elders. The gender of diaconal delegates to a classis shall be consistent with the decisions of that classis concerning the supplement to Article 3-a of the Church Order.

We also take note of Calvin Theological Seminary professor (emeritus) Henry De Moor’s comment on this decision. He writes,

It can be argued, therefore, that the CRCNA is gradually moving toward the view that it is a person’s ordination as such and not his or her specific office or mandate that qualifies a person for delegation to the classis. Or, to put it another way, the CRCNA may finally be drawing the logical conclusions regarding the parity of offices.

(Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary, p. 235)

De Moor also notes that many issues dealt with at classis (and we would add synod) have a diaconal dimension, such that it is fitting that deacons are present to help deliberate on them. He provides a template for revising Article 34 that the task force has found most helpful:

The major assemblies are composed of officebearers who are delegated by their constituent minor assemblies. The minor assemblies shall provide their delegates with the proper credentials which authorize them, *in a manner*

consistent with the uniqueness of the particular office, to deliberate and vote on all matters brought before the major assemblies. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which the delegate or the church of which the delegate is a member is particularly involved.

(Christian Reformed Church Order Commentary, p. 236)

5. Another related principle is that the delegation of deacons to major assemblies is not about equal representation, as if there should be some balance of power; but rather it is about the *full* representation of the *whole* church which these offices represent. When deacons are missing from major assemblies, the full voice of the church is not heard, nor is the full ministry of the church under discussion. The purpose of the major assemblies is not simply governance and adjudication but deliberation about the church's character and ministry, a deliberation in which the deacons ought surely to participate. It is our hope that the full participation of deacons at major assemblies may also help to nurture and advance the missional dimension of these deliberative assemblies.
6. Yet another guiding principle is one which we might call "minimal regulation for maximum engagement." The church has considerable "freedom in obedience" to structure itself for the greatest engagement by its members and for maximum kingdom impact in the world. For example, John Calvin states, "If the church requires it, we may not only without offense allow something to be changed but permit any observances previously in use among us to be abandoned" (Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.10.32). Reflecting on Calvin's handling of Church Order, one commentator concludes that, according to Calvin, "As long as the church is apostolically carrying out the task, the form of the office is not constrained to a particular historical or geographic interpretation of it" (Thea Leunk, "The Office of Deacon: Calvin's Ecclesiology, Geneva's Practice, and the CRC Diaconate," 1999).

In his Church Order commentary, Professor De Moor reminds us that John Calvin envisioned a minimum of regulations, flexible ones at that, but these were also to be manifestly biblical. De Moor cites Belgic Confession Article 32: "we reject all human innovations and all laws imposed on us, in our worship of God, which bind and force our consciences in any way. So we accept only what is proper to maintain harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God." The innovation in Acts 6, to appoint seven who would provide for the needs of widows, can be seen as such an innovation.

On this basis the task force is recommending that the Church Order provide greater flexibility concerning the length of terms of office to allow for greater continuity in ministry, sustainability of programs and relationships, greater development of diaconal gifts, and succession planning. Results of the survey suggest that there is a lingering perception that deacons are "elders in training" and also that deacons receive inadequate training. Our studies lead us to believe that longer terms of office along with more intentional training may help to unleash ministry potential, change the minimalist perception of the role of deacons, and lead to healthier churches with dynamic ministries. Of course, changing Church Order articles cannot, by itself, effect any sweeping change, but it can remove structural hindrances that inhibit flourishing diaconates.

IV. Proposed revisions to the Church Order and its Supplements

The Office of Deacon Task Force is proposing changes to the Church Order and its Supplement. Each change is linked to one or more of the six guiding principles as found in section III of this report, which function as grounds for each recommended revision. The revisions are not all of equal weight, nor will they each have equal impact. For example, the amendment in Article 1 in which the task force suggests including the critical text of Ephesians 4:12 will not make as great an impact on the administration of the church as the proposed changes to Article 45. Yet these revisions hang together as a single coherent shift in our understanding of *diakonia* in the church. Language matters, and it is important for the language of the Church Order to be both expansive in order to allow for a growing sense of ministry, and precise in order that the church may be well governed and function in good order.

V. Recommendations

A. That synod grant the privilege of the floor to Mr. Terry Woodnorth, chair; Rev. Roy Berkenbosch, reporter; and task force members Mr. Andrew Ryskamp and Mrs. Lori Wiersma when the report of the Diakonia Remixed: Office of Deacon Task Force is addressed.

B. That synod approve the following changes to the Church Order and its Supplements as indicated:

Note: **Boldface text** indicates changes from the current Church Order.

Current Article 1

a. The Christian Reformed Church, confessing its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of his church, and desiring to honor the apostolic injunction that in the churches “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40), regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities in the following articles.

b. The main subjects treated in this Church Order are The Offices of the Church, The Assemblies of the Church, The Task and Activities of the Church, and The Admonition and Discipline of the Church.

Proposed Article 1

a. The Christian Reformed Church, confessing its complete subjection to the Word of God and the Reformed creeds as a true interpretation of this Word, acknowledging Christ as the only head of his church, desiring to **“equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Eph. 4:12) and to** honor the apostolic injunction that in the churches “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor. 14:40) regulates its ecclesiastical organization and activities in the following articles.

b. [Remains the same]

Ground: See Guiding Principle 1.

Current Article 4

- a. In calling and electing to an office, the council shall ordinarily present to the congregation a nomination of at least twice the number to be elected. When the council submits a nomination which totals less than twice the number to be elected, it shall give reasons for doing so.
—Cf. Supplement, Article 4-a
- b. Prior to making nominations the council may give the congregation an opportunity to direct attention to suitable persons.
- c. The election by the congregation shall take place under the supervision of the council after prayer and in accordance with the regulations established by the council. Adult confessing members in good standing shall have the right to vote.
- d. After having called the elected persons to their respective offices and having announced their names, the council shall proceed to ordain or install them if no valid impediment has arisen. The ordination or installation shall take place in the public worship services with the use of the prescribed ecclesiastical forms.

Proposed Article 4

- a. In calling and electing to an office, the council shall ordinarily present to the congregation a nomination of at least twice the number **of suitably gifted persons** to be elected. When the council submits a nomination which totals less than twice the number to be elected, it shall give reasons for doing so.
—Cf. Supplement, Article 4-a
- b. Prior to making nominations the council may give the congregation an opportunity to direct attention to **suitably gifted** persons.

c. [Remains the same]

d. [Remains the same]

Ground: See Guiding Principle 1.

Current Article 11

The calling of a minister of the Word is to proclaim, explain, and apply Holy Scripture in order to gather in and build up the members of the church of Jesus Christ.

Proposed Article 11

The calling of a minister of the Word is 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** (Eph. 4:12).

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1, 2, and 3.

Current Article 12

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

b. A minister of the Word who (1) enters into the work of missions or chaplaincy, or (2) is appointed directly by synod, or (3) whose appointment is ratified by synod shall be called in the regular manner by a local church, which acts in cooperation with the appropriate committees of classis or synod.

c. A minister of the Word may also serve the church in other work which relates directly to the calling of a minister, but only after the calling church has demonstrated to the satisfaction of classis, with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies, that said work is consistent with the calling of a minister of the Word.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 12-c

Proposed Article 12

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

b. [Remains the same]

c. [Remains the same]

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 2 and 4.

Current Article 25

a. The elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designated by the council. As a rule a specified number of them shall retire from office each year. The retiring officebearers shall be succeeded by others unless the circumstances and the profit of the church make immediate eligibility for reelection advisable. Elders and deacons who are thus reelected shall be reinstalled.

b. The elders, with the minister(s), shall oversee the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and fellow officebearers, shall exercise admonition and discipline along with pastoral care in the congregation, shall participate in and promote evangelism, and shall defend the faith. The elders also shall nurture in the congregation grateful and

obedient participation in the Lord's Supper through encouragement, instruction, and accountability.

c. The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people, especially to those who belong to the community of believers, and shall stimulate the members of Christ's church to faithful, obedient stewardship of their resources on behalf of the needy—all with words of biblical encouragement and testimony which assure the unity of word and deed.

Proposed Article 25

a. The elders and deacons shall serve for a limited time as designated by the council. **The length of term should be appropriate for continuity and succession of ministry leadership, accountability for ministry outcomes, and the regular infusion and flourishing of gifts as the Spirit endows each generation.** Retiring officebearers shall be succeeded by others unless the circumstances and the profit of the church make immediate eligibility for reelection advisable. Elders and deacons who are thus reelected shall be reinstalled.

b. [Remains the same]

c. The deacons shall represent and administer the mercy of Christ to all people. **Deacons shall lead the congregation in ways that inspire faithful stewardship of their time, talent, and resources and so give life in this world the shape of God's kingdom by calling the members to be ambassadors of reconciliation in all areas of life. Thus, deacons shall create and encourage participation in structures and ministries that use member gifts in areas of compassion, community transformation, creation care, justice, stewardship, and pastoral care, both locally and globally.**

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1, 2, 3, and 6.

Current Article 34

The major assemblies are composed of officebearers who are delegated by their constituent minor assemblies. The minor assemblies shall provide their delegates with proper credentials which authorize them to deliberate and vote on matters brought before the major assemblies. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which the delegate or the church of which the delegate is a member is particularly involved.

Proposed Article 34

The major assemblies are composed of officebearers who are delegated by their constituent minor assemblies. The minor assemblies shall provide their delegates with proper credentials which authorize them, **in a manner consistent with the uniqueness of their particular office,** to deliberate and vote on **all** matters brought before the major assemblies. A delegate shall not vote on any matter in which the delegate or the church of which the delegate is a member is particularly involved.

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 4 and 5.

Current Article 35

a. In every church there shall be a council composed of the minister(s), the elders, and the deacons. Those tasks which belong to the common administration of the church, such as the calling of a pastor, the approval of nominations for church office, mutual censure, meeting with church visitors, and other matters of common concern, are the responsibility of the council.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 35-a

b. In every church there shall be a consistory composed of the elders and the minister(s) of the Word. Those tasks which belong distinctively to the office of elder are the responsibility of the consistory.

c. In every church there shall be a diaconate composed of the deacons of the church. Those tasks which belong distinctively to the office of deacon are the responsibility of the diaconate. The diaconate shall give an account of its work to the council.

Proposed Article 35

a. [Remains the same]

b. In every church there shall be a consistory composed of the elders and the minister(s) of the Word. Those tasks which belong distinctively to the office of elder are the responsibility of the consistory. **The consistory shall give an account of its work to the council.**

c. [Remains the same]

Ground: See Guiding Principle 4.

Current Article 40

a. The council of each church shall delegate a minister and an elder to the classis. If a church is without a minister, or the minister is prevented from attending, two elders shall be delegated. Officebearers who are not delegated may also attend classis and may be given an advisory voice.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 40-a

b. The classis shall meet at least every four months, unless great distances render this impractical, at such time and place as was determined by the previous classical meeting.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 40-b

c. The ministers shall preside in rotation, or a president may be elected from among the delegates; however, ordinarily the same person shall not preside twice in succession.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 40-a and -c

Proposed Article 40

a. The council of each church shall delegate a minister, an elder, **and a deacon** to the classis. If a church is without a minister, or the minister is prevented from attending, **another elder** shall be delegated **in place**

of the minister. Officebearers who are not delegated may also attend classis and may be given an advisory voice.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 40-a

b. [Remains the same]

c. [Remains the same]

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 4 and 5.

Current Supplement, Article 40-a

The council of each church shall delegate a deacon in addition to a minister and an elder, provided the classis approves of the delegation of deacons to its meetings. Deacons delegated to classis shall be given credentials identical to those given to ministers and elders. The gender of diaconal delegates to a classis shall be consistent with the decisions of that classis concerning the supplement to Article 3-a of the Church Order. Delegates who believe the seating of women delegates is in violation of the Word of God may record their protest on the appropriate credentials. Their names, along with their protests, shall be included in the official record of each classis meeting. If a classis so desires, it may also invite emerging churches to delegate two officebearers to the meetings of classis.

(*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 621)

(*Amended Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 612)

(*Amended Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 613)

Note: A classis must decide whether the delegation of deacons by the member churches of classis is permissible. If classis has so decided, then each congregation will delegate three delegates (a minister, elder, and deacon) to all the meetings of classis.

Proposed Supplement, Article 40-a

The gender of delegates to a classis shall be consistent with the decisions of that classis concerning the supplement to Article 3-a of the Church Order. Delegates who believe the seating of women delegates is in violation of the Word of God may record their protest on the appropriate credentials. Their names, along with their protests, shall be included in the official record of each classis meeting. If a classis so desires, it may also invite emerging churches to delegate **three** officebearers to the meetings of classis.

(*Acts of Synod 1997*, p. 621)

(*Amended Acts of Synod 2007*, p. 612)

(*Amended Acts of Synod 2009*, p. 613)

(*Amended Acts of Synod 2013*, p. xxx)

Current Supplement, Article 40-a and -c

Modification for Churches of Classis Red Mesa

a. The council of each church shall delegate a minister and two elders to the classis. If a church is without a minister or the minister is prevented from attending, three elders may be delegated. Officebearers

who are not delegated also may attend classis and may be given an advisory voice.

c. The presiding officers of classis shall be selected from officebearers within the classis. The same presiding officers shall not be chosen twice in succession.

(Acts of Synod 1981, p. 16)

Proposed Supplement, Article 40-a and -c

Modification for Churches of Classis Red Mesa

a. The council of each church shall delegate a minister, **an elder, and a deacon** to the classis. If a church is without a minister or a minister, **elder, or deacon delegate** is prevented from attending, **any combination of three officebearers may be delegated**. Officebearers who are not delegated also may attend classis and may be given an advisory voice.

c. The presiding officers of classis shall be selected from officebearers within the classis. **Ordinarily** the same presiding officers shall not be chosen twice in succession.

(Acts of Synod 1981, p. 16)

(Amended Acts of Synod 2013, p. xxx)

Current Article 42

a. The classis shall be responsible for appointing persons to provide counsel and advice to churches. The classis shall appoint church visitors to visit each church in classis on a yearly basis. The classis shall appoint classical counselors to provide advice to any church in the process of calling a minister of the Word.

b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of officebearers chosen for their experience and counsel, with teams composed of two ministers or one minister and one elder. Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 42-b

c. The classical counselor's task is to ensure that a church in the process of calling a minister of the Word observes ecclesiastical regulations and sound process. The counselor shall be an officebearer, normally a minister of the Word, whose ministerial credentials or membership resides in a congregation other than the church in the process of calling a minister. The classical counselor shall provide classis with a written report during and after the calling process.

Proposed *Article 42*

a. [Remains the same]

b. The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of office-bearers chosen for their experience and counsel. **Team composition should include a minister and at least one other officebearer.** Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis a written report of their work.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 42-b

c. [Remains the same]

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 4 and 5.

Current *Article 45*

The synod is the assembly representing the churches of all the classes. Each classis shall delegate two ministers and two elders to the synod.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 45

Proposed *Article 45*

The synod is the assembly representing the churches of all the classes. Each classis shall delegate **one minister, one elder, one deacon, and one other officebearer** to the synod.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 45

Grounds: See Guiding Principle 4 and 5.

Current *Article 62*

Offerings for benevolence shall be received regularly in the worship services. Offerings also shall be received for other ministries of the congregation and the joint ministries of the churches.

Proposed *Article 62*

Opportunity will be given regularly, as part of our worship, to offer gifts, both financial and otherwise, to develop and sustain ministries of the congregation, locally within its own community, the shared ministries of the denomination globally, and other causes that the church supports.

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 2 and 3.

Current *Article 64*

a. Each church shall minister to its adult members so as to increase their knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to nurture a mature faith in Christ, and to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers.

b. Each church shall provide opportunities for continued instruction of adult members. This instruction shall be supervised by the consistory.

Proposed Article 64

a. Each church shall minister to its adult members so as to increase their knowledge of the Lord Jesus, to nurture a mature faith in Christ, to encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers, **and to equip them to fulfill their Christian vocation in the church and in the world.**

b. [Remains the same]

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1 and 2.

Current section heading: D. Missions

Proposed section heading: D. **Ministries of the Church**

Current Table of Contents title for Article 73: The Church's Mandate to Missions

Proposed Table of Contents title for Article 73: The Church's Mandate to **Ministry**

Current Article 73

a. In obedience to Christ's Great Commission, the churches must bring the gospel to all people at home and abroad, in order to lead them into fellowship with Christ and his church.

b. In fulfilling this mandate, each council shall stimulate the members of the congregation to be witnesses for Christ in word and deed and to support the work of home and world missions by their interest, prayers, and gifts.

Proposed Article 73

a. **In response to both the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor and the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, the churches must strengthen and prepare their members to engage in holistic mission in the world.**

b. **Each local church shall engage its community as a living demonstration that God's kingdom reign is present, that redemption has been won, and that healing and reconciliation are possible. In this engagement the local congregation shall offer an invitation for others to come and experience new life in Christ and carry out all the functions of a missionary congregation (worship, faith nurture, pastoral care, and missions).**

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1, 2, 3, 6, and *Additional grounds for proposed changes to Articles 73-77* (below).

Current Table of Contents title for Article 74: The Mission of the Congregation

Proposed Table of Contents title for Article 74: The **Ministry** of the Congregation

Current Article 74

- a. Each church shall bring the gospel to unbelievers in its own community. This task shall be sponsored and governed by the council. This task may be executed, when conditions warrant, in cooperation with one or more neighboring churches.
- b. Each church shall carry on a ministry of mercy. The deacons shall enable the needy under their care to make use of Christian institutions of mercy. They shall confer and cooperate with diaconates of neighboring churches when this is desirable for the proper performance of their task. They may also seek mutual understandings with agencies in their community which are caring for the needy, so that the gifts may be distributed properly.

Proposed Article 74

- a. Each church **must interpret its missionary calling for its unique context. The council shall be responsible to provide leadership and training, and to facilitate planning and enabling structures to help the church fulfill its evangelistic and diaconal calling. Churches are urged to work together with neighboring churches, appropriate community resources, classical and denominational systems, and whatever gifts God has placed in their reach in carrying out this task.**
- b. Each church shall **ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates.**

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1, 2, 3, 6, and *Additional grounds for proposed changes to Articles 73-77* (below).

Current Table of Contents title for Article 75: The Mission of the Classis

Proposed Table of Contents title for Article 75: The **Ministry** of the Classis

Current Article 75

- a. The classes shall, whenever necessary, assist the churches in their local evangelistic programs. The classes themselves may perform this work of evangelism when it is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches. To administer these tasks, each classis shall have a classical home missions committee.
- b. The classes shall, whenever necessary, assist the churches in their ministry of mercy. The classes themselves may perform this ministry when it is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches. To administer this task, each classis shall have a classical diaconal committee.

Proposed Article 75

a. The classes shall **have a ministry plan that articulates how they will support the churches in meeting their missionary mandate, as well as how they will advance the work of the kingdom in the region the classis represents. Classis shall bridge the resources of the local churches with the resources of the denomination. The CRC Ministry Plan shall address how this is to be accomplished.**

b. **Each classis shall ensure that deacons and elders are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates.**

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1, 2, 3, 6, and *Additional grounds for proposed changes to Articles 73-77* (below).

Current Table of Contents title for Article 76: Denominational Ministries in North America

Proposed Table of Contents title for Article 76: **Denominational Ministries**

Current Article 76

a. Synod shall encourage and assist congregations and classes in their work of evangelism, and shall also carry on such home missions activities as are beyond their scope and resources. To administer these activities synod shall appoint a denominational home missions committee, whose work shall be governed by synodical regulations.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 76-a

b. Synod shall encourage and assist congregations and classes in their ministry of mercy, and shall carry on such work as is beyond their scope and resources. Synod shall appoint a diaconal committee to administer the denominational ministry of mercy. The work of this committee shall be governed by synodical regulations.

Proposed Article 76

a. Synod shall encourage and assist **churches and classes to fulfill their respective roles. Synod shall also appoint denominational ministries that engage churches and classes in jointly owned ministries that have national or global scope. Synod shall ensure that an overall plan is established that gives vision and coordination to the whole.**

b. **Synod shall ensure that elders and deacons are incorporated into the structure and plans for ministry in a manner consistent with their respective mandates.**

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1, 2, 3, 6, and *Additional grounds for proposed changes to Articles 73-77* (below).

Current Supplement, Article 76-a

The synodical regulations referred to in Article 76 may be found in the Mission Order of the Christian Reformed Board of Home Missions (Acts of Synod 1992, pp. 741-46 and subsequent revisions thereof).

Proposed: That Supplement, Article 76-a **be deleted**.

Current Table of Contents title for Article 77: Denominational Ministries Abroad

Proposed Table of Contents title for Article 77: **Synodical Governance of Ministries**

Current *Article 77*

a. Synod shall encourage and assist the joint world mission work of the churches by regulating the manner in which this task is to be performed, providing for its support, and encouraging the congregations to call and support missionaries. To administer these activities, synod shall appoint a denominational world missions committee, whose work shall be governed by synodical regulations.

—Cf. Supplement, Article 77-a

b. The denominational diaconal committee shall extend the ministry of mercy of the congregations and classes worldwide.

Proposed Article 77

Synod shall regulate the work of denominational ministries by way of the Constitution and decisions of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.

Grounds: See Guiding Principles 1, 2, 3, 6, and *Additional grounds for proposed changes to Articles 73-77* (below).

Current Supplement, Article 77-a

Synod regulates the work of the world missions committee by way of the Constitution and decisions of the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA.

Proposed: That Supplement, Article 77-a **be deleted**.

Additional grounds for proposed changes to Articles 73-77:

1. These changes grow out of the belief that the whole church is called to *diakonia*.
2. The new language is inclusive of all the denominational ministries, not just select ministries.
3. The changes reflect a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of the church's ministry.
4. Article 77 incorporates the existing Supplement, Articles 76-a and 77-a, applies it to all denominational ministries, and brings the Church Order into alignment with the governance realities of the denomination.
5. These changes integrate the roles and mandates of the offices into the mission of the church.
6. The changes recognize the continuities between regional and global ministries and the growing collaborations between ministries.

C. That synod, upon adoption of proposed Church Order changes above, adopt the following timetable for phasing in the implementation of changes to the Church Order:

1. All classes should implement Article 40 for delegation of a deacon to classis by the end of the year 2014.
2. All classes should implement Article 45 for delegation to Synod 2015.
3. Classes that already delegate deacons to its meetings are encouraged to implement Article 45 for delegation to Synod 2014.

D. That synod adopt the following revision to the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons (changes noted in **boldface text**):

Congregation of Jesus Christ:

Today we celebrate God's gift of faithful leadership for his people. We joyfully thank him for elders and deacons who have served well and completed their terms of office. And we praise him for providing their successors.

In the officebearers of the church we see the love of Christ for his people. As the Lord of the church he appoints leaders and by his Spirit equips them, so that believers may grow in faith, develop disciplined Christian living, serve others in selfless love, and share with all the good news of salvation. **The apostle Paul stated this most clearly when he wrote to the church in Ephesus, "So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his 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" (Eph. 4:11-13). And Jesus Christ taught us the spirit of true leadership when he said, "Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28).**

Elders serve by governing the church in Christ's name. They received this task when Christ entrusted the apostles and their successors with the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19). Elders are thus responsible for the spiritual well-being of God's people. They must provide true preaching and teaching, regular celebration of the sacraments, and faithful counsel and discipline while keeping in confidence those matters entrusted to them. And they must promote fellowship and hospitality among believers, ensure good order in the church, and stimulate witness to all people.

Deacons serve by **leading and equipping the church to serve its members and the world in a rich diversity of ministries, awakening compassion, demonstrating mercy, seeking justice, and collaborating with God's Spirit for the transformation of persons and communities. In imitation of Christ's mercy, deacons summon the church to help relieve victims of injustice, equip the church for ministries of reconciliation**

and peacemaking, seek opportunities for advocacy, and call God's people to faithful stewardship of the gifts of creation. By this they show that Christians live by the Spirit of the kingdom, fervently desiring to give life the shape of things to come. Deacons are therefore called to **identify and develop gifts in both the church and community**, assess needs, promote **generous stewardship, and offer wise and respectful care for the poor.** By adding to all this words of encouragement and hope, deacons demonstrate in word and deed the care of the Lord himself.

Now we intend to ordain elders and deacons and to install them for terms of service in this congregation. Those appointed to the office of elder are [names]. Those appointed to the office of deacon are [names].

To express your acceptance of these offices, you are asked to stand, and here in the presence of God and his church, to answer the following questions:

Do you believe that in the call of this congregation God himself is calling you to these holy offices?

Do you believe that the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life?

Do you subscribe to the doctrinal standards of this church, rejecting all teaching which contradicts them?

Do you promise to do the work of your offices faithfully, in a way worthy of your calling and in submission to the government and discipline of the church?

Answer [by each officebearer]: I do, God helping me.

The officiating minister shall then say [the laying on of hands at this point is optional]:

God our heavenly Father, who has called you to these sacred offices, guide you by his Word, equip you with his Spirit, and so prosper your ministries that his church may increase and his name be praised. Amen.

Charge to the Elders

I charge you, elders, to “**keep watch over** yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). Be a friend and Christlike example to children. Give clear and cheerful guidance to young people. By word and example, bear up God's people in their pain and weakness, and celebrate their joys with them. Hold in trust all sensitive matters confided to you. Encourage the aged to persevere in God's promises. Be wise counselors who support and strengthen the pastor. Be compassionate, yet firm and consistent in rebuke and discipline. Know the Scriptures, which are “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Pray continually for the church. Remember at all times that if you would truly give spiritual leadership in the household of faith, you must be completely mastered by your Lord (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

Charge to the Deacons

I charge you deacons, to inspire faithful ministries of service to one another, to the larger community, and to the world. Remind us that the Lord requires us “to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with [our] God” (Micah 6:8). Prompt us to seize new opportunities to love God, our neighbors, and the creation with acts of generous sharing, joyful hospitality, thoughtful care for the poor, and wise stewardship of all of God’s gifts. Weigh our opportunities for giving and service, that we might use the church’s resources discerningly. Offer wise care to victims of injustice, and teach us holistic responses that respect their dignity and mend the broken relationships that contribute to poverty. With respectful compassion for the needy and awareness of the often hidden needs of the wealthy, teach us to minister to rich and poor alike, both within and outside the church. Encourage all with words that bring hope to their hearts and with deeds that bring joy into their lives. Show us by your example how to be prophetic critics of the waste, injustice, and selfishness in our society, and to be sensitive counselors to victims of such evils. Let your lives be above reproach and live as examples of Christ Jesus, looking to the interests of others. **And in all your ministries help us anticipate and participate in the renewal of all things when God’s kingdom comes.**

Charge to the Congregation

I charge you, people of God, to receive these officebearers as Christ’s gift to the church. Recognize in them the Lord’s provision for healthy congregational life. Hold them in honor; take their counsel seriously; respond to them with obedience and respect; accept their help with thanks. **Wholeheartedly participate in the ministries into which they lead you.** Sustain them in prayer and encourage them with your support, especially when they feel the burden of their office. Acknowledge them as the Lord’s servants among you.

Do you, congregation, pledge to receive them as you have been charged?

Answer [by the congregation in unison]: We do, God helping us.

Prayer

Our merciful Father in heaven, we thank you that you have provided faithful and gifted people to serve as elders and deacons. As these new officebearers assume their responsibilities, fill them with your Spirit, endow them with your wisdom, and grant them strength. Make them faithful workers in your vineyard. Under their guidance may your church grow in every spiritual grace, in faith which is open and unashamed, and in the committed service that promotes your reign in the world. Help them to perform their duties with enthusiasm and humility. In their work, grant them a sense of sustained awe which is rooted in daily adoration of you, their Lord. Through them may your name be honored and your church be served.

Help us, your people, to accept them gladly, encourage them always, and respect them for the sake of your precious Son, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

E. That synod adopt the following revisions to the Guide for Conducting Church Visiting to reflect the proposed changes to Church Order Article 42-b:

1. *Current wording on page 2 of the Guide for Conducting Church Visiting*

II. Clear statement of purpose

A. *Church Order Article 42-b specifies the practice and purpose of church visiting:*

- a. The classis shall appoint at least one committee composed of two of the more experienced and competent officebearers, two ministers, or one minister and one elder, to visit all its churches once a year.
- b. The church visitors shall ascertain whether the officebearers faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and properly promote the edification of the congregation and the extension of God's kingdom. They shall fraternally admonish those who have been negligent, and help all with advice and assistance.
- c. The churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious problems arise.
- d. The church visitors shall render to classis a written report of their work.

Proposed revision for section II, A

The church visitors shall consist of one or more teams of officebearers chosen for their experience and counsel. Team composition should include a minister and at least one other officebearer. Their task shall be to ascertain whether the officebearers of the church faithfully perform their duties, adhere to sound doctrine, observe the provisions of the Church Order, and promote the building up of the body of Christ and the extension of God's kingdom. Churches are free to call on the church visitors whenever serious challenges arise that would benefit from their advice. The church visitors shall provide classis with a written report of their work.

2. *Additional revisions may be warranted to the following sections the Guide for Conducting Church Visiting:*

- a. Section IV, A (Role of council; p. 3) because the newly adopted Church Order articles would be more inclusive of deacons.
- b. Section IV, D (Role of the deacon; p. 7) would require amendment due to adopted changes articulated in describing the role of the deacon in Church Order Articles 4, 25-c, 35-a, 35-c, 65, and 74.
- c. Section IV, D (Role of the deacon; pp. 7-8)—the sample questions offered in the guide should be reviewed in order to embrace the new description of the role of deacons.

F. That synod mandate the Task Force Reviewing Structure and Culture to consider how the inclusion of deacons at major assemblies will affect the culture and structure of the CRCNA.

G. That synod adopt the following proposal for implementing the ongoing resourcing of a revitalized diaconate:

Resourcing a Re-imagined Diaconate

The task force realizes that putting the above guiding principles and Church Order changes into place requires a major rethinking of how the CRC does ministry. At a community level, it places new leadership expectations on the local diaconate. At a national level, it assumes that deacons have input into the diaconal dimension of the CRCNA's ministry planning. While pointing deacons to current resources may be helpful for training and dialogue, the task force would also recommend significant coordination and planning between the appropriate agencies and institutions of the CRC so that they connect with churches and classes to facilitate the implementation of the principles and concomitant structure changes.

The task force has catalogued a significant list of resources deacons can use, whether deacons work in a more traditional capacity or whether they engage and oversee significant transformational ministry. Discussions were held with some of the organizations that are focused on leadership development, including the training for deacons. This included Calvin Theological Seminary, Diaconal Ministries of Canada, World Renew, Christian Reformed Home Missions, Faith Alive Christian Resources, CRCNA Network, and Volunteers in Service. A sample of exciting models and resources in place are as follows:

- Diaconal Ministries of Canada's network of Diaconal Developers.
- Strong deacon conferences in many classes, especially within Canada, or regional organizations like Volunteers in Service, and Volunteers in Action.
- Home Missions' collaboration with community transformation resources in church planting efforts, and development of coaches that facilitate the creation of missional communities.
- Communities First Association's network of community transformation coaching.
- The 2009 "Power of With" Conference, facilitated by World Renew, demonstrated how churches can work with their community's resources to work for the physical and spiritual transformation of that community.
- Numerous training events and resources that come from many of the above organizations.

Some ideas for new support and collaboration:

- Using the model of the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship to provide capacity building events, grants, and training for a re-imagined diaconate.

- Regular collaborative events like the “Power of With” Conference to bring the many supportive organizations together to build vision and adapt models for the future.
- Specific degrees/certificates/courses of study at our educational institutions to prepare people for leadership for and with a re-imagined diaconate.

Next Steps

The development of this report and its recommendations has already led to discussions on how to support deacons and churches as they learn and strategize their way to being stronger missional communities. While this effort will be strengthened by the recommended changes in the Church Order, they are not dependent on them since strengthening and involving the diaconate for transforming our communities is something to which the whole church is called.

World Renew is encouraged to continue to facilitate some of the collaborative efforts mentioned above. Current budgets will limit this to collaboration and healthy networking to support deacons and churches in being missional communities of transformation. Additional funding will be sought to bring larger groups of leaders together from various organizations and geographic regions of the denomination. Communication channels, such as the CRC Network, will keep churches and their diaconates current on the support available to build their capacity and ability for ministry. These efforts need to be noted by the BOT and CRCNA planning efforts so that they can be appropriately incorporated into the CRCNA and respective agency plans, as well as reported regularly to synod as part of the strategic plan updates.

Recommendations

1. That synod instruct the Board of Trustees to ask World Renew to take the lead role in facilitating the collaboration and networking necessary to support deacons, as deacons implement and live out the changes recommended in this report. This will be done primarily by bringing leaders of resourcing organizations together for effective collaboration.
2. That the Executive Director of the CRCNA ensure that the collaboration and networking described in Recommendation G, 1 be integrated into the strategic planning processes and goals of the CRC.
3. That the Executive Director prepare a report to Synod 2014 in conjunction with the agencies that are involved in supporting the deacons in ministry. The report will include goals set and progress made in relation to supporting deacons in their new roles, based on the changes made to the Church Order.

H. That synod accept this report as fulfilling the mandate of the Office of Deacon Task Force and dismiss the task force.

Office of Deacon Task Force
Mariano Avila
Roy Berkenbosch (reporter)
Greta Luimes
Andrew Ryskamp (staff adviser)
Bonnie Smith
Lori Wiersma
Terry Woodnorth (chair)

Note: Richard Jones was appointed by the Board of Trustees to serve on the task force but was unable to serve after its first meeting.