

CHURCH ORDER of the  
PROTESTANT CHURCH  
IN THE NETHERLANDS

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**THE VOCATION OF CHURCH AND CONGREGATION**

**The church**

**Article I**

1. In accordance with its confession the Protestant Church in the Netherlands is manifestation of the one holy apostolic and catholic or universal Christian Church which, sharing in the expectation granted to Israel, looks forward to the arrival of the Kingdom of God.
2. Living by God's grace in Jesus Christ, the church carries out the mandate of its Lord to hear and to proclaim the Word.
3. Involved in God's turning towards the world, the church, in obedience to Holy Scripture as the one source and norm of the church's proclamation and ministry, confesses the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
4. The confession of the church takes place in communion with the confession of our ancestors as formulated  
in the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed - by which the church is joined to the universal Christian church -,  
in the Unaltered Confession of Augsburg and the Catechisms of Luther - by which the church is joined to the Lutheran tradition -,  
in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Catechism of Geneva and the Dutch Confession of Faith with the Canons of Dordt - by which the church is joined to the Reformed tradition.
5. The church acknowledges the significance of the theological Declaration of Barmen for its confession today.  
With the Leuenberg Agreement the church acknowledges that the Lutheran and Reformed traditions come together through a common understanding of the Gospel.
6. In its celebrations, words and actions the church continually confesses Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour of the world and thus calls for renewal of life in culture, society and state.  
The church bears witness before people, powers, and governments to God's promises and commandments and in doing so seeks a dialogue with other churches.
7. The church is called to give expression to its unrelinquishable solidarity with the Jewish people.  
As a Christ-confessing community of faith it seeks a dialogue with the Jewish people concerning the understanding of Holy Scripture, in particular as regards the coming of the Kingdom of God.
8. Sent into the world and called to administer reconciliation, the church bears witness to the salvation in Jesus Christ in proclamation and service to all people and to all nations.
9. In its witnessing in word and deed the church is obliged to act in accordance with its confession.
10. The church and all its members are called to test the confession in the light of Holy Scripture.
11. The church shuns that which contradicts its confession.

## **Article II**

1. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands is the continuation of the Netherlands Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Netherlands.
2. The Protestant Church in the Netherlands consists of all the congregations, namely the Protestant congregations, the Netherlands Reformed congregations, the Reformed congregations and the Evangelical Lutheran congregations.

### **The congregations**

## **Article III**

1. By the grace of God and in virtue of his covenant congregations are assembled around Word and sacraments.
2. To a congregation - and thus to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands - belong those whose incorporation in the fellowship of the Church has been confirmed by holy baptism and who as such have been registered as members of the congregation.
3. Those who receive baptism are called to public profession of Jesus Christ and to responsibility in the congregation.
4. Mindful of the faithfulness of the God of the covenant a congregation includes in its community the non-baptized children of congregation members as well as those who show solidarity with the congregation.
5. The church has baptized members and confessing members. Baptized members, confessing members, guest members, the non-baptized children of congregation members and those who show solidarity with the congregation are entered as such in the register of the congregation. The Evangelical Lutheran members are moreover entered in a register kept by the Evangelical Lutheran synod.

## **Article IV**

1. The congregation, blessed for this purpose by the Spirit, is called to ministry of the Word of God in the preaching of the Gospel and the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper in public worship  
in the ministry of prayers  
in missionary work  
in diaconal work  
in pastoral care  
in spiritual education  
and also in all other work  
that serves to build up the body of Christ.

2. All members of the congregation are called and authorized to use their gifts to fulfil the mandate which Christ gives to the congregation.
3. Under the supervision of the church council the congregation obeys its call by promoting the coherence in its life and work and by devoting itself entirely to praising the Name of the Lord and serving the world.

### **The offices and the ecclesial assemblies**

#### **Article V**

1. To focus the congregation on salvation and to keep it to its call in the world the public office of Word and Sacrament was given on the part of Christ.  
With a view to this ministry the church distinguishes the office of minister,  
the office of elder,  
the office of deacon  
as well as other ministries in church and congregation.
2. The office-bearers are jointly responsible for building up the life of the congregation in the world by providing for  
the ministry of Word and sacraments,  
missionary, diaconal and pastoral work,  
spiritual education,  
supervision,  
stewardship over financial affairs  
and other work serving to build up the life of the congregation.
3. The ministers as servants of the Word are especially called to  
the administration of Word and sacraments,  
the proclamation of the Word in the world,  
pastoral care and supervision  
and instruction and lay training.  
The elders are especially called to  
care for the congregation as a community,  
bear co-responsibility for the administration of Word and sacraments,  
provide pastoral care and supervision  
and train the congregation to fulfil its pastoral and missionary vocation  
and those who are designated for this purpose  
to the administration of financial affairs  
The deacons are especially called to  
the ministry at the Table of the Lord and to collect and distribute the gifts of charity,  
the ministry of compassion and justice in the congregation and the world  
the training of the congregation to fulfil its diaconal vocation  
and the administration of diaconal financial affairs
4. The call to office takes place on the part of Christ, locally by the congregation, and otherwise by the church through the authorized assemblies.
5. An office in the church can only be held by those who have been called thereto according to the order of the church, who have made profession of faith and have been confirmed in office with supplication for the presence of the Spirit.  
Confirmation in office takes place in the midst of the congregation, using a form from the church's book of worship.

6. The other ministries consist of administrations and functions to be indicated as such in the order of the church which are carried out in collaboration with the office-bearers in order to fulfil the vocation of church and congregation.

## **Article VI**

1. So that one office shall not lord it over another, one office-bearer over another, or one congregation over another, but so that all things shall be aimed at obedience to Christ the Head of the Church, the leadership in the church is entrusted to ecclesial assemblies.
2. These assemblies are  
for the local congregation the church council;  
for the congregations belonging to a classis the classical assembly;  
for the Evangelical Lutheran congregations together also the Evangelical Lutheran synod;  
for all congregations together and hence for the entire church the general synod.
3. The church council is formed by ministers, elders and deacons serving in the congregation.  
The classical assembly is formed by the delegated office-bearers of the church councils of the congregations belonging to the classis.  
The composition of the Evangelical Lutheran synod takes place according to rules separately laid down for that purpose.  
The general synod is formed by the office-bearers delegated by the classical assemblies and the delegates of the Evangelical Lutheran synod.
4. The church council directs the life and work of the congregation.  
The classical assembly directs the life and work of the classis and in doing so expresses the responsibility of the congregations for each other and for the entire church, as well as the responsibility of the church for the congregations.  
The Evangelical Lutheran synod directs the life and work of the Evangelical Lutheran congregations and takes care of preserving the Lutheran tradition and making it serve the entire church.  
The general synod directs the life and work of the church as a whole.
5. The church council shall not take decisions in affairs which are of essential importance for the life of the congregation without consulting the members of the congregation on these affairs.
6. Without losing its final responsibility, the church council can share its care for building up the life of the congregation with working groups to be instituted by the council.
7. For work that is to be carried out jointly for the congregations the classical assemblies will work together in general classical assemblies according to rules laid down by ordinance.  
A general classical assembly is formed by members of the classical assemblies working together in it.
8. In order to fulfil the vocation of the church and the congregations the classical assemblies will be assisted by auxiliary bodies.  
An auxiliary body is instituted by an ecclesial assembly and is charged, under the responsibility of that assembly, with the task assigned to this body in its field of work.
9. An ecclesial assembly can designate a number of its members who together form a broad moderamen to which the assembly can delegate the exercise of certain powers, according to rules laid down by ordinance.
10. For carrying out work that is of general importance to a classis, to the Evangelical Lutheran congregations together or to the church as a whole, the ecclesial assemblies concerned can call

ministers in general service of the church or appoint functionaries who are attached to the classis, the Evangelical Lutheran congregations together or to the church as a whole respectively.

11. The major assemblies will deal only with those matters which according to the order of the church belong to the work of the major assemblies, or with those which cannot be concluded in the minor assemblies.

## **THE LIFE OF CONGREGATION AND CHURCH**

### **Worship services**

#### **Article VII**

1. Called by its Lord the congregation assembles for the reading of Holy Scripture and the public preaching of the Gospel, the administration and the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper, the ministry of praise and prayer and the ministry of compassion and justice. The congregation assembles for repentance, thanksgiving and prayer services, doctrinal services, marriage services and services of mourning and commemoration. Furthermore, the church has daily prayer services with thanksgiving and prayers.
2. Worship services are lead by those designated in the order of the church. The order of worship services is determined by the church council taking into account the special responsibility of the ministers and those taking care of church music. For use in worship services the general synod, according to rules given by ordinance, designates, offers, or determines the Bible translation, the psalm-book and hymn-book and the worship book with liturgical forms.
3. The church celebrates the Lord's day. The church celebrates and commemorates on special days the coming, the birth, and the appearance of Christ, his suffering, death and resurrection, his ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The church celebrates the Sunday of the Trinity. The church commemorates the day of the Reformation.

### **Holy baptism**

#### **Article VIII**

1. Holy baptism is administered in the midst of the congregation by a minister with the use of one of the forms from the church's worship book.
2. Baptism is administered to those for whom or by whom baptism is desired after profession of faith has been made by and with the congregation.
3. Baptism is administered under the responsibility of the church council, with due respect for the guidelines laid down by the church.

## **The Lord's Supper**

### **Article IX**

1. The Lord's Supper is celebrated by the congregation and administered by a minister with the use of one of the forms from the church's worship book.
2. To the Lord's Supper are invited those who confess Jesus Christ and assent to His praise and who have been introduced into this mystery by instruction in faith.
3. The church council determines after consultation in the congregation in what way the members are prepared for participation in the Lord's Supper and also whether the members can participate in the Lord's Supper only after public profession of faith.
4. The Lord's Supper is celebrated under the responsibility of the church council, with due respect for the guidelines laid down by the church.

## **Missionary, diaconal and pastoral work**

### **Article X**

1. On account of its missionary task, the congregation is devoted in its entire existence to witnessing and ministry to those who do not know the Gospel or are alienated from it, so that they too may share in the salvation in Jesus Christ.
2. The congregation fulfils its diaconal vocation in the church and in the world by sharing, in the ministry of compassion and justice, the gifts bestowed on it, helping where there is no helper and bearing witness to the justice of God where injustice occurs.
3. The congregation performs its pastoral task in pastoral care to members and others who need this care, so that they may edify one another in faith, hope and love.
4. As to the fulfilment of its missionary, diaconal, and pastoral vocation, the congregation seeks to cooperate with other local church communities.
5. With a view to the fulfilment of its vocation the congregation makes grateful use, in a relationship of reciprocity, of insights and experiences offered to it by congregations of which the members come from different cultures.

## **Spiritual education**

### **Article XI**

1. The congregation is called to be and remain a learning community.
2. The education and training of its members takes shape in instruction and reflection, in meditation and prayer, in consultation and active exertion.
3. The spiritual education of young congregation members takes place in religious instruction at home and in the congregation,

and in work with and for the benefit of young people.

4. The congregation has the task of cooperating in the spiritual education of young people at school and in other institutions where they are educated and trained, and it seeks opportunities for the expression of faith in the social and cultural contexts in which young people orient themselves.
5. By means of catechetical teaching ecclesiastical instruction is given to the young members of the congregation and to all those who desire this instruction.
6. The aims of catechetical instruction are learning to live by God's promises and according to his commandments, training for Christian witnessing in the world, discovering and learning to use the gifts for building up the congregation of Christ, introduction into the celebration of baptism and the Lord's Supper and preparation for public profession of faith.
7. Catechetical instruction concerns reading and understanding Holy Scripture; the worship service, hymns and prayers; the confession and the history of the church; life as a Christian in the world.
8. Public profession of faith is made to receive or confirm baptism, as a token of willingness to bear witness to the Lord, to bear co-responsibility in the congregation of Christ and to stay within the communion of Word and sacraments. Public profession of faith takes place in the midst of the congregation with the use of a form from the church's worship book. The church council talks with those who intend to make profession of faith about their motivation and about the content of their faith.
9. Care of catechetical instruction rests with the church council.

## **Supervision**

### **Article XII**

1. The congregation is called to stay on the path of the confession of the church. Supervision, grounded in the compassion of Jesus Christ, takes place to the glory of God, to preserve the congregation and to save those who err.
2. In the congregation the members are called to look after each other pastorally and lovingly and to edify each other in faith, hope and love.
3. The supervision that is exercised by or by order of the ecclesial assemblies concerns the spiritual life of the congregations, obedience to their vocation, and the execution of offices and other services; the confession and conduct of members and of office-bearers and of those who perform other services; and the proclamation, catechetical instruction, and the education and training of ministers.
4. Supervision of the congregations takes place by means of visitation and concerns their spiritual life, obedience to their vocation, and the execution of offices and other services, its purpose

being to build up the life of the congregation.

5. Supervision of the confession and conduct of members and office-bearers and of those who perform other services is exercised by pastoral dialogue and admonition.
6. With a view to the right administration of Word and sacraments, the church exercises supervision of proclamation and catechetical instruction, as well as the education and training of ministers.
7. If necessary, the church shall proceed to apply the means entailed in ecclesiastical discipline, according to the rules laid down by ordinance.

### **Care of financial affairs**

#### **Article XIII**

1. The care of the financial affairs of the congregation rests with the church council, which entrusts the discharge of these affairs to the board of deacons, as far as the administration of diaconal financial affairs is concerned and those elders specially designated for this purpose, who together - supplemented, if so desired, by other members of the congregation - form the board of church stewards, as far as the administration of the other financial affairs of the congregation is concerned.
2. The care of the financial affairs of the classis rests with the classical assembly.
3. The care of the financial affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, including the financial affairs of the Evangelical Lutheran congregations together, rests with the Evangelical Lutheran synod.
4. The care of the general finances of the church rests with the general synod.
5. The care of financial affairs is supervised by the designated bodies of the church.

### **Complaints and disputes**

#### **Article XIV**

1. Complaints and disputes for the consideration of which no separate body or particular manner of consideration is indicated in the order of the church are presented to the boards designated for this purpose.
2. Without prejudice to the provisions in paragraph 1 a request may be made to an ecclesiastical body to reconsider a decision taken by this body.

### **The education and training of ministers**

#### **Article XV**

1. The care of the education and training of ministers rests with the general synod.
2. The education and training of ministers takes place at universities and seminaries founded or designated by the church.
3. Those who have been educated elsewhere or possess singular gifts may be given alternative

access to the office of minister by the general synod.

4. Those who desire admission to the office of minister shall cooperate in the investigation into suitability, competence and vocation for the office.
5. If there are no objections, they are granted the right to be a candidate for the office of minister after taking the appropriate oath.

### **The life and work of the church in an ecumenical perspective**

#### **Article XVI**

1. As manifestation of the one holy apostolic and catholic or universal Christian church, the church is called to seek and promote unity, fellowship and cooperation with other churches of Jesus Christ.  
The church takes part in and stimulates ecumenical work in the Netherlands and in the world. It seeks and maintains closer relations with churches to which it is joined by special confessional or historical bonds.  
It seeks union with the churches with which there is unity or kinship in faith and church order.
2. In missionary work, in the Netherlands and in the world, the church fulfils its missionary vocation, together with local churches and congregations, in support of each other.
3. In diaconal work, in the Netherlands and in the world, the church carries out its mandate to labour for those who suffer and to help them in their search for comfort and justice, in cooperation with local churches and congregations and with kindred institutions.
4. The church conducts its work of witness and service in respectful intercourse with other religions.

### **THE ORDER OF THE CHURCH**

#### **The ordinances**

#### **Article XVII**

1. The order of the church is more specifically determined by ordinance.
2. An ordinance is laid down or changed by the general synod.
3. A proposal to lay down or change an ordinance can be submitted either by a classical assembly, by the Evangelical Lutheran synod or by an auxiliary body of the general synod, or in the general synod itself.  
However, the aforementioned assemblies cannot make a final decision to submit such a proposal in the same assembly as that in which the proposal was made.
4. After the general synod has laid down an ordinance or a change in an ordinance in first reading, it is submitted to the church councils for consideration by the classical assemblies and by the Evangelical Lutheran synod.
5. After this the general synod can lay down the relevant ordinance or change in an ordinance.

#### **Change in the church order**

## **Article XVIII**

1. Changes in the church order are introduced by the general synod.
2. A proposal to introduce a change in the church order can be submitted either by a classical assembly or by the Evangelical Lutheran synod, or in the general synod itself. However, the aforementioned assemblies cannot make a final decision to submit such a proposal in the same assembly as that in which the proposal was made.
3. A change in the church order concerning the Evangelical Lutheran congregations and the Evangelical Lutheran synod can only be laid down in first reading after positive advice from the Evangelical Lutheran synod.
4. After the general synod has laid down a change in the church order in first reading, it is submitted to the church councils for consideration by the classical assemblies and by the Evangelical Lutheran synod.
5. After this the general synod can lay down the change in the church order, for which a majority of two thirds of the valid votes is required.

### **The order of the church in times of emergency**

## **Article XIX**

1. If and insofar as extraordinary circumstances of country and nation make it impossible for the life of the church to function normally, the appropriate bodies of the church or their members shall take temporary measures, deviating from the order of the church as the circumstances make necessary.

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8 December, 2004