

Overture from the Reformed Church of Bishopdale

Re: Amending the Church Order

The Reformed Church of Bishopdale overtures Synod to amend articles 39, 48 and 58 of the Church Order.

Article 39

Article 39 states:

When a church is without a minister, the session shall request presbytery to designate a minister of a neighbouring church as a counsellor. The session shall consult the counsellor on all important matters, especially regarding the calling of a minister. The counsellor shall attend the session meetings whenever requested to do so.

We propose that the first sentence be deleted and replaced with the following:

When a church is without a minister, the presbytery shall appoint a minister as a counsellor for that church. Ordinarily the counsellor shall be a minister of a church which is in the same presbytery as the vacant church.

Grounds

1. The amended article would give greater flexibility when it comes to the appointment of a counsellor.
2. The meaning of “neighbouring church” is unclear and has caused difficulties.
3. The requirement for a session to request presbytery to appoint a counsellor is largely redundant and therefore is best omitted.

Article 48

Article 48 of the Church Order states:

Presbytery shall make provision for church visitation at least once per year. Each church shall be visited by two elders normally (at least one of whom shall be a minister). The synodically approved questionnaire shall be followed in general and a report of each visit rendered to the presbytery.

We propose that the first sentence be deleted and replaced with the following two sentences:

Presbytery shall make provision for church visitation at least once per year. Normally each church shall be visited by two elders (one of whom shall be a minister or an experienced elder). For the purposes of this article, “an experienced elder” means one who has who has actively served as an elder for more than six years.

Grounds

1. The article as amended would give greater flexibility when it comes to church visitations.
2. The requirement that the church visitation must be done by a minister is unduly restrictive. For example, where there many vacant churches in a presbytery, this places a heavy burden on the remaining ministers. While it is possible to fly ministers from other presbyteries, this is expensive and less than ideal. It is best that the church visitors are readily available to attend the presbytery meeting at which that report is discussed.
3. An experienced elder should be able to conduct a church visitation well. An elder who has served six years will have served at least one full term, perhaps even two.

Overture 10
Amending the Church Order, Bishopdale

Article 58

Article 58 of the Church Order states:

The Covenant of God shall be sealed by Holy Baptism unto children of believers, including children legally adopted by members of the congregation. The session shall see to it that baptism is requested and administered as soon as feasible.

We suggest that the first sentence of that article be amended to read:

The children of believers shall be baptised; such children include those adopted by or in the permanent care of members of the congregation.

Grounds

1. The article as it is currently worded does not fit our practice. Foster children are being baptised where the arrangement is a permanent one.
2. Adoption is now far less common than at the time this article was written. Long-term care fostering arrangements are now the norm.
3. It is right and proper for children who are being brought up in Christian homes to be baptised. This is consistent with household circumcision recorded in the Old Testament, and household baptisms in the New Testament.