

PURPOSE OF CLASSIS ACCORDING TO CRCNA CHURCH ORDER

The purpose of classis cannot be clearly and easily stated. However, there are several aspects of classis and the classical structure that help to clarify the purpose of classis.

I. Definition of Classis

A classis shall consist of a group of neighboring churches. (Church Order Article 39)

“Article 39 defines the classical assembly as a group of neighboring churches. Each organized church belongs to a classis. (*Manual of Church Government, 2001, p.245*)”

“The classis is the official assembly of a group of neighboring congregations. It consists of two official delegates (a minister and an elder) from each congregation and ordinary meets every four months. (*Manual, p. 159*)

II. Authority of Classis

Classis is a major assembly established with the authority of Christ given to the church to exercise that authority over the councils of the local churches.

“Each assembly exercises, in keeping with its own character and domain, the ecclesiastical authority entrusted to the church by Christ.” (Church Order Article 27a)

“The essential authority of the church is to make the church what God calls it to be. Christ rules his church by his Word and Spirit. Each member, each special office, and each assembly is called upon to build up the body of Christ to fully represent him and do his work so that in all things his purposes may be accomplished in and through his church. Every member, officebearer, and assembly exercises this authority committed to the church by Christ.” (*Manual, p. 162*)

“The classis has the same authority over the council as the synod has over the classis.” (Church Order Article 27b)

“In matters that are properly the province of a major assembly, the Church Order declares that the major assemblies have authority over the minor assemblies—the classis has authority over the council...” (*Manual, p. 162*)

III. Delegation

The authority of classis is a delegated authority.

“...the authority of councils being original, that of major assemblies being delegated.” (Church Order Article 27a)

“The major assemblies are duly constituted assemblies of the churches and consist of delegates authorized to ‘take part in all deliberations and transactions of the assembly and transacted in agreement with the Word of God and according to the conception of it embodied in the doctrinal standards of the Christian Reformed Church, as well as in harmony with the Church Order’” (*Manual, p. 162*)

“The classis is the official assembly of a group of neighboring congregations. It consists of two official delegates (a minister and an elder) from each congregation and ordinary meets every four months. (*Manual, p. 159*)

“The point of Article 34 is that the major assemblies are representative of the congregations constituting the minor assemblies. Each minor assembly has representatives and a voice through these representatives in the major assemblies of the church. This representation binds the church together. (*Manual*, p. 219)”

IV. Unity of the church

“To express and maintain the broader unity of the church and to reach out beyond the local boundaries, our councils (minor assemblies) unite in broader (major) assemblies that we call classes.” (*Manual*, p.162)

“The advantages to three meetings a year that should not be given up except for good cause are:

- 1) the opportunity to respond to the agenda of synod,
- 2) more frequent contact among the churches,
- 3) closer supervision of the work of classis,
- 4) the distribution of the burden of the work over three meetings instead of two.” (Acts of Synod, 1985, p. 725)

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V. Matters of Concern

There are certain matters which are proper for classis to undertake and others with which classis should not concern itself.

“Article 28: Matters Legally Before Assemblies

- a. These assemblies shall transact ecclesiastical matters only, and shall deal with them in an ecclesiastical manner.
- b. A major assembly shall deal only with those matters which concern its churches in common or which could not be finished in the minor assemblies.” (Church Order Article 28 a & b)

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a. Matters of common concern

Projects and programs that can be carried on by the minor assemblies should be done by the assemblies and not by the major assemblies. A council should not ask classis to do work the council is capable of doing...However, our councils delegate to classis many matters that concern all the churches of the classis in common.” (*Manual*, p. 166)

Those matters of concern include the following:

- 1) Business matters that impinge upon all churches, e.g. examination of candidates for ministry. (Articles 10, 23, 43, 82-84)
- 2) Accountability of the churches
 - i. Church visitors (Article 42)
 - ii. Discipline (Article 82-84)
- 3) Provide advice to the churches—through church visitors (Article 42)
- 4) Evangelism (Article 75)
 - i. Assist local churches
 - ii. Perform evangelistic work through a classical home mission committee when that work is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches.
- 5) Ministry of Mercy (Article 75)
 - i. Assist local churches

- ii. Perform mercy ministries through a classical diaconal committee when that work is beyond the scope and resources of the local churches.
- 6) Provide financial assistance to those preparing for ministry by granting financial aid administered through a Student Fund Committee. (Article 21)

(Classis Grandville, January 2004)