

Volume: 01 Issue: 01 | July-2021

**Received:** 28.05.2021; **Accepted** 30.05.2021; **Published:** 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

Kariuki, J. W., et al., Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud..—*Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

## **Relevance of the Reformed Church Polity Principles: An Analysis of the Constitution of the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA)**

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### **Abstract**

This paper drawing to the foundations of both Presbyterian and Reformed church polity principles, evaluates the constitution of the Reformed Church in East Africa providing a proposed church order for the future of RCEA. The distinctiveness of church law is that it must also derive from the Bible what entails Christ's will for His church and then implement it for contemporary times (Coertzen, 1998, p. 7). In *Church and Order, A Reformed Perspective* the principles of Reformed Church law and church government are exclusively and extensively treated as well as the historical development of Reformed church government and the practice of the subject as part of the theological curriculum. Presbyterianism negates that all church power vests in the clergy: that the apostolic office is perpetual, and that each individual Christian congregation is independent. It is upon this principle that RCEA was born having adopted the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) in 1963 prompted by the government's requirement to be registered as an organization. However, whether the Reformed Church in East Africa (RCEA) is Reformed or Presbyterian in its government is a question to be discerned.

**Key Terms:** Constitution, Church polity, Principles, Reformed Church in East Africa, Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya.

### **Article Citation (APA)**

Ekitala, L. A. (2021). Relevance of the Reformed Church Polity Principles: An Analysis of the Constitution of the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA). *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.*, 1(01), 27-53.

<https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

There is a link between ecclesiology and church polity. Church orders are structured in legal articles, which translate the ecclesiology of a church. Dingeman's (1992) presupposition is that the structure of the church is largely determined by whether the foundation of the church order is Christological or Pneumatological. Christological ecclesiology identifies the ecclesiastical institution with the Body of Christ and gives the church a direct Christological structure (p. 223), while the Bible presupposes that Christ remains the Head of his congregation. On the other hand, Pneumatological ecclesiology considers the church as a creation of the Spirit, not only the Body of Christ to the world and offers a wide participatory opportunity for people in the church (Dingeman, 1992, p. 224).

According to Hanko (1962, p. 5-9) the concept of church polity was first used by Wilhelmus Zepperus, who called it *Politiae Ecclesiae* (1595). He was the first Protestant theologian who made a special study of church government. Gysbertus Voetius used the name in a slightly altered form thus *Politica Ecclesiastica* (1962, p. 5-9). The concept of polity is derived from the Latin *politia* meaning pertaining to the state or commonwealth; administration of civil affairs; citizenship with its rights, privileges, and obligations (Hanko, 1962, p. 5-9). Bakker (1992, p. 14) asserts that the concept 'polity' usually refers to the rules and regulations that churches seek to regulate its organization and operations, as well as its relationship to the outside and how the church should organize her life and work. The church law is rooted in the ecclesiology and the doctrine of the church.

Hanko (1962) therefore reiterates that church polity is the science of church government comprising two sub-branches namely kybernetics and the rules and regulations of a denomination. Kybernetics derives from the Greek word *kuberna'n* meaning "to rule" (Hanko, 1962, p. 5). It is the application of the rules of a denomination practically (Bakker, 1992, p. 17) and specifically deals with the principles of church government. The other branch deals with the rules and regulations of a denomination. Based on the foregoing definitions of the concept of polity, it can be said that the church is not only concerned with how it is governed, but also and above all, how it is should be governed. Church polity therefore goes beyond the internal organization of her life, to the relationship with the outside world and society.

In the Apostles Creed, the Church is declared the communion of saints. The Church according to Hodge (1879, p. 5) is not a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a democracy. It may be either, all, or neither. The conception of the Church as the communion of saints therefore does not include the idea of any external organization. The bond of union may be spiritual Hodge (1879, p. 5). The church is a place and space within the Kingdom where gifts and powers of the Kingdom are given and received (Coertzen, 2004, p. 83). The task of the church according to

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Coertzen is to nurture its membership by undiluted proclamation of the Gospel, the genuine administration of the sacraments, according to the institution of our Lord Jesus Christ as well as imposing church discipline for sins (2004, p. 84). According to Coertzen (2004, p. 90) all things must be done decently and in an orderly way in the Church (1 Corinthians 14:40). The *Belgic Confession* states:

We believe that we ought, diligently and circumspectly, to discern from the Word of God, which is the true church. But we speak not here of hypocrites, who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church, though externally in it, but we say that the body and communion of the true church must be distinguished from all sects, who call themselves church. The marks by which the true church is known are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin (*Belgic Confession* Article 27). Pieter Coertzen makes in his book *Church and Order, A Reformed Perspective* a distinction between order in the church and order for the church. After that, he proceeds to lay out the grounds in which a church order is to be formulated. Coertzen's premise is that church law is distinct from other laws because it seeks to fulfill the will of Christ for His Church.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### Literature Underpinning

Taking into account the historical development of Presbyterianism as well as the right of Reformed churches across the globe to adapt principles to varying conditions and circumstances into account Plaatjies-van Huffel (2014, p 34) argues that there are basic six Reformed church polity principles namely: Self-government under the sole headship of Christ, the limited autonomy of the local congregation, the denominational ties serve the well-being of the Church, the restricted power and responsibilities of ecclesial assemblies, the necessity and nature of Christian discipline, the right of appeal, and the power of the major assemblies with regard to misconduct. Plaatjies-van Huffel (2014) warns that violation of these principles can lead either to independent church governance or to hierarchy. She furthermore asserts that the basis of Presbyterian/Reformed polity is theological and affirms that the Reformed church polity principles are being shaped by the work of the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformer John Calvin (Plaatjies-van Huffel, 2014).

### Reformed/Presbyterian Church Government

According to du Plooy (2014, p. 5), Calvin may be regarded as the architect of the reformed churches and as the father of Reformed church polity. Calvin was a legislator and is the founder of system of church polity and discipline employed in reformed/Presbyterian churches across the globe. Calvin already established in 1537 in

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Geneva rules of order for pastors and deacons. In 1541, the four pastors (Viret, Jacques Bernard, Henry de la Mare, and Aymé Champereau) and six councilors to whom was added Jean Balard as advisory member, were appointed to draw up a new code of laws for Geneva (Schaff, 1882(b), p. 338; Johnson, 1900, p. 49). John Calvin built his understanding of church government on the foundation laid by Martin Bucer (Bouwman, 2000, p. 29). Calvin too, like Martin Bucer emphasized the office of all believers and many of the principles of Reformed church polity are to be found in Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* especially in Book IV (Hanko, 1962, p. 6).

Based on 1 Corinthians 14: 40 "Let all things be done decently and in order" Calvin distinguished the "power to make laws," the power to govern and the power to teach in both the *Ordonnances ecclesiastiques* as well as the *Institutes of Christian Religion* the distinctive principles of Calvin's system of government are:

- i. The self-government of the church under the headship of Christ. Calvin distinguished sharply between church and state. God in Christ is head of both church and state.
- ii. Ecclesiastical discipline of all the members of the church from the greatest to the smallest to be exercised by a parliamentary court consisting of ministers of the Word and ruling elders.
- iii. A consistory, or parliamentary court, consisting of elders of two classes, to exercise this discipline.
- iv. The recognition and reinstitution of the New Testament ruling eldership (*Institutes of Christian Religion* Book IV. Chapter 3.x; Chapter 10.vii, xxvii-xxxiii).

Leith (1977, p. 143) indicates five features of Calvin's Polity. First, Calvin emphasizes that the integrity and competence of pastors should be maintained by careful examination of life, the ability to study theology and the capacity to communicate the Word of God. On the minister of the Word was discharged the responsibility of preaching, leadership, worship, teaching and of pastoral care. Second, the consistory had the responsibility to oversee the discipline of the congregation. Discipline was not an end in itself. It rather ensured that; the glory and honour of God was affirmed again, evil should not corrupt the good and that those who had fallen into sin were helped wholeheartedly. Third, Calvin lays emphasis on catechetical instruction. Christians must know what they believe through regular programmes of catechetical instruction. Fourth, Calvin lays emphasis on the office of the deacon as the church's ministry of compassion and lastly but most notable feature of Calvin's polity is the emphasis on the acts of God by His Spirit through the Word and sacraments that create the church. All formal marks of the church and all structures are subordinate to the grace of God (Leith, 1977, pp. 144-146).

John Calvin emphasizes in the *Institutes of Christian Religion* the order through which the Lord wants His church to be managed. Christ as head of the Church, rule and reign in the church. He holds to the highest authority, practices, and administers this sovereignty through His Word and Holy Spirit. The twenty chapters of Book IV of

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the *Institutes of Christian Religion* entail the following themes: Of the Church; Of the Sacraments; Of Civil Government (*Institutes of Christian Religion* Book IV Chapters 1-20). Calvin maintains that Christ's sovereignty and authority in the church are executed through the ministries that He gives the church in both their individual capacities and when members congregate in meetings (*Institutes of Christian Religion* Book IV Chapter 3).

Calvin laid great stress on the outward organization and order of the Church, but in subordination to sound doctrine and the inner spiritual life. He compares the former to the body, while the doctrine which regulates the worship of God, and points out that the way of salvation, is the soul which animates the body and renders it lively and active (Schaff, 1882(b), p. 333). The essential features of the *Ordonnances ecclesiastiques* have passed into the constitutions of most of the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches of Europe, America and Africa. According to Schaff (1882(b), pp. 333-336) the Calvinistic system of church polity is based upon the following principles:

- a) The autonomy of the Church, or its right of self-government under the sole headship of Christ. Calvin vests the self-government in the Christian congregation, and regards all the ministers of the Word, in their official character, as ambassadors and representatives of Christ.
- b) The independence of the Church in all spiritual affairs, and the right of individual congregations in the election of their own pastors.
- c) The parity of the clergy as distinct from a *jure divino* hierarchy whether papal or prelatial.
- d) The participation of the Christian laity in Church government and discipline.
- e) Strict discipline to be exercised jointly by ministers of the Word and lay-elders, with the consent of the whole congregation.
- f) Union of Church and State on a theocratic basis, if possible, or separation, if necessary to secure the purity and self-government of the Church.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA) affirms the following historic principles of Presbyterian Church government and discipline as follows:

- a) The right of private judgment both for the individual or group within the church and for the church within the state. The right of private judgment is freedom from arbitrary laws, civil or ecclesiastical, which bind conscience. The individual has the right to dissent from church laws, which the person believes to be a violation of conscience. The corporate conscience of the church is expressed through the governing bodies (session, presbytery, synod, and General Assembly).
- b) This second Principle makes it clear that there is no basic conflict between the freedom of conscience and the necessity for the church to make rules to order its life. Churches have the right to regulate their own internal affairs without government interference. Individuals, also, have the right to exercise private judgment within the decision-making processes of the church of which they are a part. Every member of a governing body has the basic rights to: (1) know, (2) speak, (3) vote, (4) hold office. These rights enable every member to participate fully

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in the decision-making processes, being heard and exercising influence upon the body. When a church body takes an action, individuals may register their disapproval. When the governing body does require compliance with an action, it is still possible for a dissenting individual to agree to abide by the decision and to fulfill the requirements for action while, at the same time, holding a different position from that of the majority.

c) The church must have order in its life. Church officers function as representative members of governing bodies and exercise responsibility corporately.

d) Presbyterian polity provides a method for dealing with conflict. The processes assure that fairness and order accompany the decision-making and that differing points of view will be openly expressed.

e) Nonessential issues are not unimportant but are those subjects about which diversity is understood to be desirable or acceptable. Essential matters are those regarding which the church does require uniformity of either belief or practice. No church governing body may bind conscience contrary to Scripture.

f) The Holy Scripture defines the general character, qualifications, authority, and purpose of church officers but the church must interpret Scripture and establish the general rules by which it operates.

g) Scripture is the highest authority, and no governing body may legislate contrary to what Scripture plainly teaches. This respect for Scripture means that all church bodies must exercise care not claiming too much authority for themselves. Ministerial power is performed in a carefully prescribed manner in obedience to the higher authority of Scripture. Declarative power is limited to that of stating what biblical teaching is in a given situation.

h) There is one body, which is the church and all the diverse parts of that body make up the whole. Action on the part of any governing body has an impact upon all the others. Presbyterian polity seeks to express the wholeness and unity of the church by insisting upon the interrelatedness of all the parts.

i) The larger part of the church is given authority over the smaller. Each governing body is representative of a part of the church, and it is given a particular role to play in the whole with carefully described powers and duties. Each governing body also has limitations upon its acts imposed by the Constitution.

j) Every governing body is composed of persons who are elected to represent the church. Representatives are not simply to reflect the will of the people but rather to seek together to find and represent the will of Christ for the Church

k) The unity of the church is exemplified in the provision for appeals from one governing body to another. When an individual believes that a wrong has been committed in a congregation, for example, that person may appeal to a more inclusive governing body, the presbytery, and failing to be satisfied there, may carry the complaint on to the synod and General Assembly. This right of appeal recognizes the right and duty of the more inclusive governing body to make decisions binding upon the less inclusive body (*United Presbyterian Church, Report of the Special Committee on Historic Principles, Conscience, and Church Government* (1983, p. 141ff).

The Presbyterian form of government affirms that all believers are righteous in Christ and partake in Christ's threefold office of prophet, priest, and king (Bouwman, 2000, p. 29). These believers are united by one faith in

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one Christ, and therefore are one body together - a Church. Christ as Head rules over His Church specifically through the office of the elder (Bouwman, 2000).

The Reformed church's government on the other hand is characterized by a system of ecclesiastical assemblies. These may be in ascending or descending order (Berkhof, 1962, p. 193). These assemblies are representative; with elders who are freely elected attending with their pastors (Witherow, 1967, pp. 67-71). They are: the consistory, the classis (presbytery) and the synod. The consistory comprises the pastor or pastors and the elders of the local church. The classis is made up of the pastor and one elder from each local church. The synod consists of an equal number of the elders and ministers of the Word from each classis (Berkhof, 1962). The underlying principle of this structure is based on the requirement of church articles that "No church (local congregation) shall have precedence or rule over another church, no minister over another minister, no elder over another elder, no deacon over another deacon, but each will be alert for all suspicion thereof and occasion thereto. This principle excludes any thought of hierarchical relationship between the various office-bearers and assemblies of the church (Blei & Janssen, 2006, p. 15).

The relationship between the different church assemblies is addressed within the context of mutuality. The local congregation is a church and therefore a complete body of Christ. The council of the local church is made up of the elders and the minister of the Word. The classis is the link between the local congregation and the synod, either provincial or national. The local church is a complete manifestation of the church of Christ. It is a complete church by itself and as a unit. The church's responsibilities are divided among multiple offices and office bearers. Ministers of the Word are to preach the Word and administer the sacraments. Doctors are to educate the parishioners. Elders are to maintain discipline and order and adjudicate disputes. Deacons are to control church finances and coordinate the church's care for the poor and needy. Each of these church officials, Calvin believed, is to be elected by fellow communicant members of the congregation. Each is subjected to the limitation of the office and the supervision of fellow officers. Each is to participate in periodic congregational meetings that allow members to assess their performance and to debate matters of doctrine and discipline (Witte, 2010, p. 49).

The Presbyterian Church government is known by the word Presbyterian, 'presbyter' being the Greek word for elder. Reformed church government is *elder-centred* church government (Bouwman, 2000, p. 30). 1 Timothy 5:17 speaks of two kinds of elders, but the one does not have more authority than the other has Bouwman (2000) (c.f. 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9; 1 Corinthians 1:18-29; Titus 1:5-9). Bouwman (2000) is of the opinion that Calvin checkmated the Pope with the pawn of the elder. According to Bouwman (2000, p. 29) God is pleased to use the "pawn of the elder", the 'little man', in order to cultivate growth in His congregation.

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Bouwman (2000) and Hanko (1962): Hanko point out the following characteristics as being unique to the Reformed church government.

- a) Reformed church government acknowledges that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, and that He rules His Church by the office-bearers, the elders.
- b) The local congregation is, in itself, a complete manifestation of the body of Christ. (See Article 27 *Belgic Confession*).
- c) Reformed church government recognizes that all believers are equipped by the Holy Spirit to carry out the office of all believers
- d) These autonomous congregations unite together into a federation of churches
- e) They are called to express unity in a common confession
- f) Within the federation of churches each congregation remains autonomous

Article 27 of the *Belgic Confession* reads as follows:

#### **Article 27—The Catholic or Universal Church**

We believe and profess one Catholic or Universal Church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit. This Church has existed from the beginning of the world and will be to the end, for Christ is an eternal King who cannot be without subjects. This holy Church is preserved by God against the fury of the whole world, although for a while it may look very small and as extinct in the eyes of man. Thus, during the perilous reign of Ahab, the Lord kept for Himself seven thousand persons who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Moreover, this holy Church is not confined or limited to one particular place or to certain persons but is spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. However, it is joined and united with heart and will, in the same Spirit, by the power of faith.

For the maintenance of good order in the church of Christ, and for the promotion of its true welfare offices, assemblies, the Reformers (Van Dellen & Monsma, 1967, p. 19; Schaff, 1882, p. 330) instituted supervision of doctrine, sacraments and ceremonies, and Christian discipline. Brand et al. (2004, p. 148) observed that the Scottish Presbyterianism is aristocratic. The Synod or General Synod is the highest assembly; from it authority flows downward to the lower ecclesiastical courts. In the Congregational system, the highest authority is all members of the local church. This means from them authority flows upward to the higher courts.

#### **Methodology**

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The study employed a church judicial research of the primary and secondary sources of the RCEA for example acts, minutes and juxtaposed it with different church order *inter alia* *Ordonnances ecclesiastiques (1541)*, *Church Order of Dordt (1619)*, Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), Free Reformed Church in Australia (FRCA), Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN), Reformed Church in Australia (RCA) URCSA and DRC. The *Ordonnances ecclesiastiques (1541)* of Calvin played a pivotal role in the formation of later Dutch church ordinances according to Plaattjes-van Huffel (2014, p. 33). The author attended to primary sources in the study namely the *Constitution of the RCEA 1963* and 1992 as well as the annual Synod resolutions on related matters. The researchers also attended to primary sources; in particular those kept at the archives of the RCEA and at the Reformed Institute for Theological Training (RITT) in Eldoret, *inter alia* minute of the RCEA synods, RCEA annual reports, parish reports, departmental reports, resolutions of RCEA meetings and the church publications, *Sauti ya Vijana* and the *Tuzungumza*. The primary sources were then translated from Swahili to English.

### 3.0 RESULTS

The Reformed church polity principles as well as provisions in the reformed church orders were used as a lens to evaluate the *Constitution of the RCEA*. It was resolved by the RCEA Synod of 2000 to review the *Constitution of the RCEA 1992* in order to address the power struggle between office bearers, the question of baptism, the ordination of women, the relationship of RCEA and other churches as well as the relationship between RCEA and the state (*RCEA Synod Resolution, 2000, p. 21*).

The reformed church orders *inter alia, Church Order of Dordt (1619)* are compared with Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PCN), Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) with the *Constitution of the RCEA 1992* and propositions on amendments to the *Constitution of the RCEA 1992* are then made.

Tables have been used to compare three church orders deriving from different contexts namely the church order of the DRC, URCSA, and the Reformed Church in America and Protestant Church in the Netherlands. The Church Order of Dordt influenced the church governance system of all these churches. Churches in Africa, influenced by the mission endeavors of the DRC missionaries, ordinarily follow the structure of the *Church order of Dordt* for example the church orders of the URCSA:

- a) Concerning the offices
- b) Concerning ecclesiastical assemblies
- c) Concerning doctrine, sacraments, and ceremonies
- d) Concerning censure and ecclesiastical admonitions (*Church Order of Dordt 1619; Church order of URCSA 2016*)

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Based on the provisions made in four Reformed churches in different contextual backgrounds namely the DRC, the URCSA, the Reformed Church in America and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and their adherence to reformed church polity principles, the RCEA takes account of the provisions made in reformed church orders regarding:

- The Offices
- The Ecclesiastical Assemblies
- Worship, Sacraments and Ceremonies
- Nature and purpose of church discipline.

The RCEA should therefore attend in the envisaged church order of the RCEA to the following:

- The offices: ordination of women
- The power and responsibilities of the ecclesial assemblies
- Provision of the Forms of Unity in the confessional basis of the RCEA and the administration of the sacraments
- The necessity and nature of Christian discipline and the right to appeal.

The envisaged church order of the RCEA will affect the governance as well as practice of the denomination on congregational (minor assemblies) level (especially with regard to the offices, discipline, appeal and sacraments) as well as in the major assemblies (ordination of women, doctrinal issues).

### **Proposed church order for the RCEA—*The ecclesiology of the proposed church order***

In the drafting of the envisaged church order, the RCEA should take cognizance of the fact that a church order or constitution of a church is the ecclesiology of a denomination expressed in legal terms. The RCEA embraces the church judicial principle: “The self-government under the sole headship of Christ” (c.f. Reformed church polity principle *Self-government under the sole headship of Christ* Chapter 2.3.1). The RCEA affirms furthermore in article 2.5 of its *Constitution* that the RCEA is part of the universal church wherein the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed a government in the hands of church office-bearers receives from Him its Divine King and Head and from Him alone. The RCEA furthermore affirms the right and power to legislate and to adjudicate in all matters of doctrine, worship, governance and discipline in church (Article 2, 5 *Constitution of the RCEA*, 1992).

Christ is the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Hebrews 12:23). The premise of the RCEA is that the church is a community of believers, the household of God. The members of the Church share the gifts of the Spirit. In the words of John Calvin, the church universal is a multitude gathered from all nations; it is divided and dispersed in separate places, but it agrees on the one truth of divine doctrine and bound by bond of the same religion. In it

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

are included all individual churches, disposed in towns and villages according to human need, so that each rightly has the name and authority of the church. Whereas the church is a worldwide people of God, it is also the local congregation as manifested locally in the villages and towns all over the world. The church is essentially a people that the apostle Peter refers to as “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and God’s own people” (1 Peter 2:9).

The church exists to serve the ministry of God, to serve ministry to believers and to serve ministry to the world (Grudem, 1994, p. 867). According to Hall and Hall no order can be maintained without authority, laws and a set of officers to apply the laws and administer the form of order, which may have been, adopted (Hall & Hall, 1994, p. 87). In order for the church to foster the common peace and maintain concord, a form of organization must be put in place (Bauwsman, 1988). Church order and organization are therefore important and essential for the well-being of the church. Jesus Christ is the legal representative of the church (Giles, 1995, p. 126). The headship of Christ over the church is an indication of His leadership of the church and its government. In this position, He leads guides and protects the Church. The wellness of the church and its growth entirely depends on the association and relationship it maintains with Jesus Christ, who is the Lord and Ruler of the Church (Coertzen, 2004, pp. 91-93; Vorster, 2003, p. 10).

The local church reveals and promotes the reign of God in all its beauty and splendour (Vorster, 2003, p. 8; Kung, 1992, p. 56). Church polity is designed to promote the subservience of the church in the kingdom. Reformed Church government is based on the concept of the church within the context of the Kingdom of God. Those given the responsibility, to execute the government of Jesus Christ are to do so in the truth that they are serving on behalf of Jesus Christ. Those given the responsibility to serve the church do not exercise the authority and power of the church, but that of Jesus Christ (De Witt, 1969, p. 69).

The government of Jesus Christ in the church is through the Word and the Spirit. This is realized in practice through the services that the church provides as he specifically gave, set for, allocated for and entrusted to it. It is through this service that the church is felt and makes an impact in the society, where believers and the followers of Jesus Christ follow His example. The authority with which the church acts and conducts its exercises is connected to the fact that it is based in the living Word of God (Coertzen, 2004, p. 101). The church has its origin in the prior plan of God who established a covenant with man that constitutes the constitutionality of the church through the work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is through the Word that the terms of this covenant are established and sealed. Christ, therefore, rules the church because it is the creation of God and hence, the church should be in complete obedience to the Word of God. The concept of the divine right of

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**Received:** 28.05.2021; **Accepted** 30.05.2021; **Published:** 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

Kariuki, J. W., et al., Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud..–*Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

government is convinced that that Church government is exercised by the power that is ministerial and declarative.

Christ is the only Legislator of the Church and entrusted ecclesiastical authority and legislative power merely to the offices of the RCEA. Christ as head of the Church uses people for the leadership of his Church. The authority of office-bearers in the RCEA is nothing else than positions delegated by Christ. The RCEA should take cognizance that ecclesiastical jurisdiction is a joint power to be exercised by Presbyters in courts and not by the executive of the church. Koffeman points out that church polity and a church order is always dependant on the ecclesiological understanding of the church, as it manifests in a certain time and certain place within a certain community (Koffeman, 2009, p. 11). In other words, a church order needs to be contextual. When a church order is written for a specific church in a specific context, it implies making choices based on fundamental ecclesiological insights (Koffeman, 2009, p. 12).

### ***The offices: Ordination of women***

The Reformed church polity principle, *the limited autonomy of the local congregation* (c.f. Chapter 2.3.1), emphasizes among others, the question concerning the equality between the ministers and the ecclesiastical assemblies. Article 84 of the *Church Order of Dordt* states clearly that no church shall in any way lord over another church, no minister over other ministers, no elder or deacon over other elders or deacons. This Reformed church polity principle is also being embraced by the RCEA in Article 3.1 of the *Constitution of the RCEA 1992*, which states: “Least the one congregation shall lord over the other, the one office over the other, the one office-bearer over the other....” The question of “ordination of women” in RCEA has generated and continues to generate conflicting opinions among various RCEA pastors, parishioners and students in theological institutions regarding equity and equality of male and female candidates for ministry.

According to Chemorion (2013), RCEA had 27 women who had finished their theological training at various levels from diploma to Master’s degree and nine who were at the time undergoing theological training in various institutions (p. 1). Whereas there has been no dispute on theological training for women, there is no consensus on the role of women who graduate from theological institutions. The question is: What should they do after they train for ministry of Word just like their male counterparts. The same question has been raised for over two decades in various synod sittings but a final decision has not been made.

Volume: 01 Issue: 01 | July-2021

**Received:** 28.05.2021; **Accepted** 30.05.2021; **Published:** 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

Kariuki, J. W., et al., *Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud.* – *Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

According to Chebet and Cherop (2012), although female members of the RCEA are allowed to study theology at RITT they cannot be ordained as ministers of the Word in RCEA. Some of them are rather appointed after their internship in church departments as coordinators, as chaplains in RCEA-sponsored schools and some as lectures at the Reformed Institute for Theological Training (RITT). There are however not much vacant positions to be absorbed by the women who received theological training. Ordination of women is therefore still a huge issue at the RCEA (Chebet & Cherop, 2012, p. 175). Rose Barmasai was the first female member of the RCEA to have received theological training but like most other women did not receive a scholarship from the Reformed Mission League to study theology whilst the later sponsored male theological students of the RCEA. She was instead seconded by the RCEA to receive a scholarship to study theology at St. Paul's United Theological College with the provision that she will be trained for the ministry of women and not for ordained positions in the RCEA (Chebet & Cherop, 2012, pp.175-176).

The *Constitution of the RCEA* 1992 states clearly that the requirements for ordination of the minister of the Word, elders, evangelist and the professor of Theology as biologically male, or if married only monogamously in a church ceremony” (*Constitution of the RCEA*, 1992: Article 3.4.1 (d)). The 2010 General Assembly of the RCEA amended the clause in the *Constitution of the RCEA*, which stated that a minister of the Word and/or a professor of Theology must be “biologically male”. However, although the church judicial restriction was removed during 2010 it did not necessarily lead to women theologians of the RCEA being ordained as ministers of the Word or appointed as professors at the RITT. Women were still excluded from the ordained position.

The call to open the pulpits for women is not only a call for change but it is also a call to responsible stewardship. Our church can no longer afford the luxury of wasting such resources given to us by God. It is certainly time for our church to change from the old tradition of not ordaining women to a new tradition of ordaining them. However, the final decision on this subject can only be made carefully and prayerfully by the honorable members of the synod and as the Holy Spirit guides them (Chemorion 2013, p. 1, Chebet & Cherop, 2012, p.179). In this article, the following recommendations to the RCEA regarding the issue of ordination of women are made:

1. The Synod of the RCEA takes with gratitude note of the WCRC General Assembly 2017 decision that the WCRC Executive Committee will open a space of discernment and offer accompaniment, educational materials and guidance to member churches that do not presently ordain women.
2. The Synod of the RCEA takes with gratitude note that the WCRC Executive Committee will develop principles and an action plan by which the pledge of *A Declaration of faith on women's ordination* will be realized prior to the next General Council in 2024. The RCEA realizes that the RCEA as member church of the WCRC should attend to the issue of ordination of women as ministers of the Word, elders and evangelists before The WCRC General Council 2024.

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

3. The Synod of the RCEA realizes that affirmative decisions regarding the ordination of women will necessitated that women theologians should be eligible to be appointed as professor of Theology at the Reformed Institute for Theological Training.
4. The Synod of the RCEA approves a resolution that gender sensitive language should be utilized in the envisaged church order of the RCEA.

### ***The power and responsibilities of the ecclesiastical assemblies***

According to Plaatjies van Huffel major assemblies are not *higher* assemblies with more authority (Chapter 2.34). The *Constitution of the RCEA* makes provision for ecclesial assemblies in the local church (Article IV), the parish (Article V), formation of presbytery (Article VI), the synod (Articles VII). Too much power in the RCEA resides in the moderator and general secretary. Other Protestant churches make ordinary provision in their stipulations for four ecclesiastical assemblies' namely church council, presbytery, synod, and general synod.

According to Küng (1971), the bearers of these offices are therefore no more than servants for the Lord are and not bosses of the people of God. They are rather instruments in the hands of the Head of the church. They are, according to Küng, not dignitaries with their authority based on the "higher office", but are rather believers who are servants to Christ who has authority of the whole church (p. 363). The church orders of the DRC, the URCSA, the Reformed Church in America and the Protestant Church in the Netherlands does not make provision for executive powers of the moderator and general secretary as employees of the Synod.

Table 1 indicates provisions made in the church orders of the DRC, URCSA, PCN regarding the power and responsibilities of the ecclesial assemblies. These church orders make provision for articles on the four ecclesiastical assemblies, the authority of these assemblies as well as on Reformed Church principle namely the equity between the assemblies and offices.

**Table 1. The power and responsibilities of the ecclesial assemblies**

<b>DRC</b>	<b>URCSA</b>	<b>PCN</b>
<p><b>Article 18</b> There are four church assemblies: church council, presbytery, synod and General Synod</p> <p>Supervision, government and discipline in the Church are entrusted to these assemblies.</p> <p><b>20.</b> The authority of the</p>	<p>There are four church assemblies: church council, presbytery, synod and General Synod.</p> <p><b>33.2</b> Supervision, government and discipline in the Church are entrusted to these assemblies.</p> <p><b>34.1</b> These assemblies have, each according to its own nature,</p>	<p><i>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, leadership in the Church is entrusted to ecclesial</i></p>

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

<p>Presbytery, according to its nature and function, over the church council is the same as that of the synod and General Synod, according to their nature and function over the other church structures</p>	<p>ecclesiastical authority conferred upon them by Christ. <b>34.2</b> The authority of the presbytery, according to its nature and function, over the church council is the same as that of the synod and General Synod, according to their nature and function, over the other church structures.</p>	<p>assemblies. These assemblies are for the local congregation; the church council for the congregations belonging to a class is classical assembly for the Evangelical Lutheran congregations together also the Evangelical Lutheran synod for all congregations synod; for all congregations together and hence for the entire church the general synod</p>
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The following recommendations are made for the amendment to the *Constitution of the RCEA*:

1. There are four church assemblies: Local church council, parish church council, presbytery council, Synod.
2. Supervision, government and discipline in the Church are entrusted to these assemblies.
3. These assemblies have, each according to its own nature, ecclesiastical authority conferred upon them by Christ.
4. The authority of the presbytery, according to its nature and function, over the church council is the same as that of the Synod, according to their nature and function, over the other church structures.
5. The church assemblies attend to affairs from an ecclesiastical perspective, in the light of the Word of God and in an ecclesiastical manner.
6. Major assemblies deal only with matters that belong there or matters which have been referred by minor assemblies and which could not be concluded by the minor assemblies.
7. A major assembly can act where a church council or presbytery does not exist anymore or is unable to constitute.
8. The resolutions of assemblies or their authorized representatives are binding, but they may be subject to appeal to a major assembly or to the authorized representative of the major assembly.

#### **Provision of Forms of Unity in confessional basis**

The RCEA confessional basis entails the historic confession of the faith known as the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasius Creed, as containing the sum and the substance of the faith of the church. The RCEA also adopts as a subordinate and provisional standard its catechism known as the *Ketekisma* until RCEA would frame its own confession of faith (Article 2.3 of the *Constitution of the RCEA*). Ordinarily some Reformed churches inter alia DRC, URCSA, PCN and Reformed Church in America have the Forms of Unity, namely the

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

thirty-seven articles of the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism* and the five *Canons of Dordt* in their confessional basis.

The *Belhar Confession* is in the first instance restricted to the issues facing the Reformed churches in South Africa during apartheid. The adoption of the *Belhar Confession*, therefore, did not take place in a political vacuum. According to Smit, quoted by Plaatjies-van Huffel (2006, p. 8), one of the co-drafters of the *Belhar Confession*, the expression *status confessionis* means “that a Christian, a group of Christians, a church or a group of churches judges that a situation has arisen, a moment of truth has come, in which nothing less than the gospel itself, their most basic confession concerning the Christian gospel, is at stake, so that they feel obliged to testify and act against that situation.” Apartheid constituted a *status confessionis* in which the truth of the gospel and the Reformed faith was at stake.

The WARC made the following declaration: “We declare with black Reformed Christians of South Africa that apartheid (separate development) is a sin, and that the moral and theological justification of it is a travesty of the gospel and, in its persistent disobedience to the word of God, a theological heresy.” According to Plaatjies-van Huffel (2006, p. 16) although the *Confession of Belhar* emerged out of a specific context it provides the global north a historic opportunity to stand in solidarity with the voices of the global south. The *Confession of Belhar* is not limited to the moment and South African context. It represents a Christian view on racism and natural division. The *Confession of Belhar* calls the church to denounce all forms of racism and injustice. The three central themes of the *Confession of Belhar*, namely unity, justice, reconciliation, have deep Biblical resonance for Reformed Christians. Through the *Belhar Confession*, churches across the globe discern the action of the triune God in their lives and in history and learn resistance in the face of behaviour that is dehumanizing (Plaatjies-van Huffel 2006, p. 16).

The Reformed Church of East Africa accepts that it has not completed its task of confessing the faith. Changed circumstances and a better understanding of the God’s Word in future may lead to the acceptance of further articles of faith, or the revision of existing articles of faith. Various churches, based on their own historical moments, embarked on decisions to adopt the *Belhar Confession* as part of their confessional basis. The *Belhar Confession* has been approved by the Calvin Protestant Church (1986), Evangelical Reformed Church in Africa in Namibia (ERCA) (1997), United Protestant United Church in Belgium (UPCB) (1998), Seattle First Christian Reformed Church (2007), The Dominican Reformed Church (2009), Reformed Church in America (RCA) (2010) and the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA)(2016). The Christian Reformed Church in North America accepted it as an *Ecumenical Faith Declaration*. Other reformed churches like Dutch Reformed

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

Church in Africa, Reformed Church in Africa and the Dutch Reformed Church unsuccessfully tried to include the *Confession of Bukhar* in their confessional basis. They tried twice to include it in their confessional basis (Vosloo, 2014, p. 74). Vosloo continues to say that the reception by the Dutch Reformed Church has had a strong antagonism on the side of the DRC that is against the *Confession of Belhar* (Vosloo, 2014, p. 74).

Table 2 indicates that the DRC, URCSA and Reformed Church in America are making provisions in their church orders for articles on the Forms of Unity. Provision are being made for an article on the Synod of Dordt in 1618-19, namely the thirty-seven articles of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the five Canons of Dordt in the confessional basis of these denominations. Both the URCSA and the Reformed Church in America include the *Belhar* Confession in their confessional basis.

**Table 2. Provisions of the Forms of Unity in the confessional basis and the administration of the sacraments**

DRC	URCSA	Reformed Church in America
The Dutch Reformed Church is based on the Bible as the holy and infallible Word of God. The doctrine which the Church confesses in agreement with the Word of God is expressed in the Forms of Unity as formulated at the Synod of Dordt in 1618-19, namely the thirty-seven articles of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the five Canons of Dort (Article 1).	The URCSA believes in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. This Church believes that the Bible is Word of God and is the full and trustworthy (reliable) witness of this revelation. This Church accepts that at certain times and in accordance with the Word of God creeds came into existence, which interpret and state the faith of the Church of Christ. The URCSA accepts the ecumenical creeds: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds, and by virtue of its own origins believes that the Confession Belgica (Netherlands Confession of Faith), the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, as handed down in history, give pure expression to its faith. It furthermore	The Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and practice in the Reformed Church in America. Its Constitution consists of the Doctrinal Standards (which are the <i>Belgic Confession</i> of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism with its Compendium, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, and the <i>Belhar</i> Confession), the Liturgy with the Directory for Worship, the Government of the Reformed Church in

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**Received:** 28.05.2021; **Accepted** 30.05.2021; **Published:** 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

	<p>accepts the Confession of Belhar (1986), as demanded of the church in the Southern African situation. The URCSA accepts that it has not completed its task of confessing the faith. Changed circumstances and a better understanding of the God’s Word in future articles of faith, or the revision of existing articles of faith (Article 1).</p>	<p>America, the Disciplinary and Judicial Procedures, this Preamble, and the Formularies. The three doctrinal statements named above, together with the Belhar Confession, are the Standards of the Reformed Church in America.</p>
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This paper thus recommends that:

The RCEA should consider incorporating the Forms of Unity namely, *Belgic Confession*, the Heidelberg Catechism and the five Canons of Dordt as well as the *Belhar* Confession in its confessional basis. The following article should be taken up in the confessional basis of the envisaged church order of the RCEA:

1. The Reformed Church of East Africa believes in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. This Church believes that the Bible is the Word of God and is the full and trustworthy (reliable) witness of this revelation. This Church accepts that at certain times and in accordance with the Word of God creeds came into existence, which interpret and state the faith of the Church of Christ.
2. The Reformed Church of East Africa accepts the ecumenical creeds: the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene and Athanasius Creeds, and by virtue of its own origins believes that the Confession Belgica (Netherlands Confession of Faith), the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt, as handed down in history, as well as the Confession of Belhar (1986), give pure expression to its faith.

### **The administration of the sacraments**

The *Constitution of the RCEA* has very little to say about the use and application of sacraments in its constitution. One of the important tasks of a RCEA minister of the Word is to administer the sacrament and ceremonies. The elders assist the pastor in the administration of the sacraments. Table 3 indicates that the DRC, the URCSA and the PCN are making ample provisions in their church orders on the administration of the sacraments namely Baptism and Eucharist. This article indicates how the sacraments should be administered, by whom, where and who are eligible to receive the sacraments.

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**Received:** 28.05.2021; **Accepted** 30.05.2021; **Published:** 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

**Table 3. Provision of the administration of the sacraments**

<b>DRC</b>	<b>URCSA</b>	<b>PCN</b>
<p><b>49.1 Baptism</b> Holy baptism is administered by a minister of the Word using water and an approved liturgical form Except done during the official public meeting of the congregation. Persons older than sixteen who are not baptised may be baptised after public profession of their faith. The baptism of someone from another denomination is recognized if it was administered in the Name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; water was used; and was administered by a person with the required competence within that denomination (cf. Functional Decision baptism 2007).</p> <p><b>49.2 Communion</b> Holy Communion is celebrated at least four times a year in each congregation, The following are admitted to holy communion: professing members of the congregation, baptismal members of the congregation who have been admitted to holy communion by the church council; visitors from other Dutch Reformed</p>	<p><b>Sacraments</b> The congregation shall assemble publicly as a community to meet with God and one another to hear the Word of God, to celebrate the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, to pray, to sing and to bring offerings, as determined by each congregation.</p> <p><b>45.1 Baptism</b> A minister of the approved liturgical administers holy baptism. Persons older than sixteen who are not baptized may be baptized after public profession of their faith. The baptism of someone from another denomination is recognized if it was administered in the Name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; water was used; and was administered by a person with the required competence within that denomination.</p> <p><b>45.2 Communion</b> The following are admitted to holy communion: professing members of the congregation;</p>	<p><b>Holy baptism</b> Article VIII 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. Baptism is administered to those for whom or who desire baptism after profession of faith has been made by and with the congregation.</p> <p>Baptism is administered under the responsibility of the church council, with due respect for the guidelines laid down by the church.</p> <p><b>The Lord's Supper</b> Article IX 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. 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. The church council determines after consultation with the congregation in what the</p>

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

<p>congregations; visitors from other churches</p>	<p>visitors from other churches. Holy Communion is celebrated at least four times a year in each congregation</p>	<p>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. The Lord's Supper is celebrated under the responsibility of the church council, with due respect for the guidelines laid down by the church.</p>
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The author recommends that the envisioned church order of the RCEA should have an article fully dedicated to addressing the matter on sacraments in the RCEA as follows:

The congregation shall assemble publicly as a community to meet with God and one another to hear the Word of God, to celebrate the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, to pray, to sing and to bring offerings, as determined by each congregation.

### **Baptism**

1. A minister of the Word using water and an approved liturgical form administers holy baptism.
2. Persons older than sixteen years who are not baptised may be baptised after public profession of their faith.
3. The baptism of someone from another denomination is recognized if it was administered in the Name of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; water was used; and was administered by a person with the required competence within that denomination.

### **Holy Communion**

The Lord's Supper is celebrated by the congregation and administered by a minister of the Word with the use of one of the forms from the church's worship book. The following should be admitted to Holy Communion:

1. Professing members of the congregation
2. Visitors from other churches
3. Holy Communion is celebrated at least four times a year in each congregation

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**Received:** 28.05.2021; **Accepted** 30.05.2021; **Published:** 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

### ***The necessity and nature of Christian discipline and the right to appeal***

Plaatjies-van Huffel (2014, p. 40) points out that exercising discipline is another fundamental principle of Reformed church polity. Furthermore, she emphasizes that provision is ordinarily being made for the right to appeal in Reformed church orders as well. (c.f. Chapter 2.3.5 and Chapter 2.3.6). She also argues that provision should be made in Reformed church orders regarding the authority granted to the major assemblies with regard to misconduct (c.f. Chapter 2.3.7). Article X of the *Constitution of the RCEA 1992* entails stipulations regarding discipline and appeals with regard to the members, elders and deacons, ministers of the Word, departmental heads, church employees as well as office bearers. The RCEA should acquaint themselves with the principles undergirding the discipline executed by churches as well as the stipulations regarding discipline in reformed church orders and amend their constitution accordingly. The RCEA should also take note that protestant church orders ordinarily do not make provision for the discipline of departmental heads as well as church employers.

Table 4 indicates the provisions in the church orders of the DRC, the URCSA and the Reformed Church in America regarding the necessity and nature of Christian discipline. The DRC makes provision in their church order for the discipline of the employees. In the other denominations, it is being dealt with as a labour issue and not as a church judicial issue. Provision is also being made with regard to the discipline of ministers in service of the denomination for example professors and lecturers of Theology. Charge concerning doctrine must first be considered by the General Synod before disciplinary actions can be implemented by the consistories.

**Table 4. The necessity and nature of Christian discipline**

<b>DRC</b>	<b>URCSA</b>	<b>Reformed Church in America</b>
<p><b>Nature of church discipline</b> 59 Church supervision, church correction and discipline are exercised: to the glory of God; for the welfare of the church; for the salvation of the sinner; as prescribed by the Word of God; the confessions; The <i>Church Order</i> and other regulations of the church. Article 61 Sins which are subject</p>	<p><b>Nature of church discipline</b> 86 The purpose of admonition and discipline as practised by the church is to glorify God: by bringing back those who have gone astray; by reconciling them with the church and their neighbours; by removing the offence that their actions gave to the congregation. Ecclesial admonition and discipline are</p>	<p><b>Nature of church discipline</b> Discipline is the exercise of the authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to the church to promote its purity, to benefit the offender, and to vindicate the honour of the Lord Jesus Christ. The exercise of discipline may take the form of admonition, rebuke, and suspension from the privileges of membership in the</p>

Volume: 01 Issue: 01 | July-2021

**Received:** 28.05.2021; **Accepted** 30.05.2021; **Published:** 31.07.2021 at [www.editonpublishing.org](http://www.editonpublishing.org)

Kariuki, J. W., et al., Editon Cons. J. Philos. Relig. Theol. Stud..–*Blind Peer Reviewed Journal*

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

to correction are those which contravene the Word of God and the confession of the Church.

**Discipline of Baptized members**

62.1 All baptismal and professing members of the congregation fall under the supervision and discipline of the church council

**64.3** Confirmed Members reprimand in a private meeting or within the meeting of the investigating body; censure comprising the withholding of the sacraments and the suspension of other privileges of membership. Excommunication from the congregation by means of the relevant form, if censure and continued pastoral care have not led to repentance

**Discipline of Elders and deacons**

**62.2** All elders, deacons and ministers, retired ministers and candidates for the ministry, fall under the supervision and correction of the presbytery without excluding the supervision of the church council over its office-bearers.

**Discipline of church councils**

**66.3.** If the presbytery or its authorized representative as investigative body/broader

exercised by Church Councils, Presbyteries and Synods and are aimed at preserving the purity of doctrine and life of the church's members and office bearers.

**Discipline of Baptized members**

**110** Non-confessing members When considering admonition and discipline of people who have not made public profession

**111 Confessing members**

When confessing members, after being admonished for deviating from healthy doctrine or faithful Christian practice, show sufficient evidence of remorse and repentance, the Church Council shall do what is necessary to achieve reconciliation. The Church Council will decide how the reconciliation should be effected and also whether the members who were admonished due to the offence they caused in the congregation will be asked to abstain from the sacraments for a particular period.

**Discipline of Elders and deacons**

**116** The admonition and discipline of office bearers is specifically concerned with the doctrine, way of life and exercise of the office entrusted to them.

church or from office, deposition from office, or excommunication, as the gravity of the offense in the opinion of the assembly or the judicatory may warrant.

**Discipline of Baptized members**

Baptized” members are members who have received Christian baptism, who may or may not participate at the Lord’s

**3. Discipline of a Member**

Membership in congregations of the Reformed Church in America includes “confessing” members, “baptized” members, and “inactive” members. Reformed Church in America congregations also includes “adherents.” All members of a local church are under its care and are subject to its government and discipline, as administered by its board of elders. The board of elders may suspend from the privileges of membership in the church a member who persistently rejects its admonitions or rebukes.

**Discipline of Elders and deacons**

3 The board of elders shall have jurisdiction in the case of a charge against an elder or deacon

**Discipline of church councils**

3 Consistories are under the care

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<p>church structure as employer is convinced of the sincerity of repentance, suspension can be lifted. Elders and deacons who were dismissed can then be elected to the church council again.</p> <p><b>Discipline of minister of Word</b> <b>64.5</b> Ministers of the gospel, retired ministers, candidates for the ministry/employees with report to the General Board.</p> <p><b>Discipline of Employee of the congregation or the denomination</b> 62.3 Members of the church who are employed by the congregation or the denomination can be corrected for misconduct. Employees can be disciplined by the church in terms of their contract of employment. They fall under the church discipline of the employer.</p>	<p><b>Discipline of church councils</b> <b>122</b> When a Church Council is guilty of misgovernment and a section of the Church Council or the congregation turns to the Presbytery for help, the Presbytery may take the disciplinary measures of suspension or dismissal has found evidence of guilt.</p> <p><b>Discipline of minister of Word</b> <b>120.2</b> The disciplinary measure of unfrocking a minister of the Word is undertaken by a regional Synod in response to the submission and recommendation of a Presbytery.</p> <p><b>Discipline of a minister in service of the denomination</b> <b>123</b> Ministers of the Word who exercise another calling with retention of their ministerial status, theological lecturers, and candidate ministers are subject to the admonition and discipline of the Presbytery in whose area they live and of the Church council of the congregation where they are members.</p>	<p>of the classis and are subject to its government and discipline. A classis has the authority, after trial, to suspend a consistory accused of unfaithfulness to duty, or of disobedience to the classis, or of violation of the Constitution of the RCA or the laws and regulations of the church.</p> <p><b>Discipline of minister of Word</b> <b>3.</b> Ministers are under the care of the classis and are subject to its government and discipline.</p> <p><b>Discipline of a minister of word and sacrament</b> 3 Discipline of a General Synod Professor In the case of charges against a minister who is also installed as a General Synod professor, charges doctrine must first be considered by the General Synod.</p>
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The author thus recommends that the RCEA includes in its envisaged church order the following articles regarding discipline, appeal and the authority granted to the major assemblies with regard to misconduct:

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### **Nature and purpose of discipline**

1. The purpose of admonition and discipline as practiced by the church is to glorify God: by bringing back those who have gone astray; reconciling them with the church and their neighbours and removing the offense that their actions gave to the congregation.
2. Ecclesial admonition and discipline are exercised by church councils, Presbyteries and Synods, and are aimed at preserving the purity of doctrine and life of the church's members and office bearers.
3. The admonition and discipline exercised by the church council in no way absolves congregation members from the responsibility to care for each in brotherly-sisterly love and, if necessary, to admonish or be admonished by one another.
4. Since ecclesial admonition and discipline has a spiritual character, it must be applied in a spiritual way and office bearers should avoid the habits of both civil litigation and worldly authority. They should not see themselves as judges but as caring overseers who – in deep humility before God and with gentle love and interest – strive to bring back to the fold those who have gone astray, with no respect of persons.
5. Ecclesial admonition and discipline must be exercised strictly in accordance with the instructions of Scripture and the articles, stipulations of the church order.
6. A distinction must be made between a single transgression and persistent sin.
7. Ecclesial discipline addresses public and persistent sins that go against the Bible and the Confessions and that were either: a) revealed as such when the caring admonition instructed by Christ in Matthew 18:15-16 was rejected, or b) was brought to the attention of the Church Council and/or Presbytery in another acceptable way.
8. Ecclesial oversight and discipline is not only concerned with transgressions that are punished by the civil authorities, but with: all kinds of misbehavior; everything that is in conflict with the Word of God; everything that is in conflict with the Communion formulary; everything that contradicts the solemn promises made at baptism, profession of faith and the wedding ceremony; anything that can disturb the good order in the church; offences of the congregation's leaders in the course of their official duties; serious negligence and carelessness in their ministry; and power abuse and corruption.
9. No disciplinary action may be carried out unless a) it was preceded by thorough investigation, and b) the "defendant" has had sufficient opportunity to state her/his case.
10. Church bodies should do their best to find amicable ways of settling the disputes or divisions that are brought before them, keeping in mind the well-being of the congregation.

### **The admonition and discipline of office bearers**

1. The admonition and discipline of office bearers is specifically concerned with the doctrine, way of life and exercise of the office entrusted to them.
2. The following office bearers are subject to this form of admonition and discipline: elders and deacons; evangelists and minister(s) of the word inducted in the congregation; ministers of the Word who have a specific task in relation to all congregations; missionaries; ministers of the Word who are involved in another calling and have retained their status as ministers of the Word; candidate ministers and emeriti.

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3. This form of admonition and discipline is exercised by the Presbytery, but office bearers are also subject to the admonition and discipline of the church council as explained in the articles above, with the understanding that the church council may only proceed to implementing such discipline after the Presbytery has suspended someone from his/her office.
4. Office-bearers will be suspended or dismissed from their office when they: Contravene the commitment they made when signing the Confessional Standards; or are guilty of a transgression mentioned in article 8; Seriously deviate from sound doctrine or a Christian lifestyle. The decision whether dismissal should take place immediately or follow a prior suspension from office is the responsibility of the competent church body.
5. When an office-bearer willfully resigns from office without supplying acceptable reasons to the church council and presbytery. The presbytery will voice its strong disapproval of the act and declare that his/her office has lapsed. In addition, the church council may, in accordance with, impose the required discipline, unless it finds no reason to do so.
6. When a charge is submitted against an office-bearer or serious suspicion arises against her/him, the presbytery will be free to suspend him/her for a specified time from exercising that office; such a suspension does not have the character of a disciplinary measure.
7. The presbytery will take the disciplinary measure of dismissing a minister of the Word from his /her office after a thorough investigation that found sufficient evidence of guilt.
8. The disciplinary measure of unfrocking a minister of the Word is undertaken by a regional synod in response to the submission and recommendation of a presbytery.
9. The disciplinary measure of suspension or dismissal of elders and deacons will be undertaken by the presbytery - likewise only after thorough investigation and sufficient evidence of guilt.
10. Ministers of the Word who exercise another calling with retention of their ministerial status, theological lecturers, candidate ministers (proponente) and emeriti are subject to the admonition and discipline of the presbytery in whose area they live and of the church council of the congregation where they are members.

#### **Appeal against a disciplinary measure**

1. An appeal against a disciplinary measure that includes unfrocking may only be heard by a regional synod.

#### **Church Council is guilty of misgovernment**

1. When a church council is guilty of misgovernment and a section of the church council or the congregation turns to the Presbytery for help, the Presbytery may take the disciplinary measures of suspension or dismissal – if it has found evidence of guilt – on condition that the church council was approached on the matter and had the opportunity to defend itself.

Volume: 01 Issue: 01 | July-2021

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#### 4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper contributes to the knowledge of the church judicial development of the RCEA and the consequent need to develop a new church order for the denomination. It is a challenge to the ecclesiology of the RCEA as well as church judicial presumptions of the Constitution of the RCEA. The paper has reviewed the Reformed/Presbyterian church polity principles and indicated how these principles should be taken into account in the drafting of the RCEA envisaged church order. RCEA is grounded in reformed church polity principles and based on that, this paper attends to amendments, which the RCEA should take into account in drafting of the envisaged church order for the RCEA.

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Volume: 01 Issue: 01 | July-2021

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjprts.v1i1.243>

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