

Rules for Ecclesiastical Relationships of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Adopted by the 45th (1978) General Assembly, *Minutes of the 45th (1978) General Assembly*, pages 116–117, 123; and as subsequently amended, *Minutes of the 64th (1997) General Assembly*, Articles 130 and 178, pages 29–31, 53; *Minutes of the 67th (2000) General Assembly*, Articles 149 and 151, pages 36–38; *Minutes of the 73rd (2006) General Assembly*, Articles 159–161, pages 41–43; *Minutes of the 79th (2012) General Assembly*, Articles 64 and 66, pages 15–18; and *Minutes of the 84th (2017) General Assembly*, Articles 88 and 97, pages 31–34.

- A. That we acknowledge the scriptural mandate (Ephesians 4) to express the unity of the church by entering into fellowship with other churches where it is consistent with biblical unity and truth as a visible demonstration of the unity of the church both to the church and to the world.
- B. That our fellowship with other churches consists in three categories. Decisions to enter into or withdraw from such fellowship shall be decided by each church on an individual basis. Because the undertaking of a bilateral relationship of either Ecclesiastical Fellowship or Corresponding Relations carries with it a commitment of substantial resources—in both time and expense—for its implementation, good stewardship of limited resources requires that these relationships ordinarily be reserved for situations in which the church seeking an ecclesiastical relationship with the OPC is either geographically proximate to the OPC (i.e., situated in North America), or has some other form of substantial contact or history with the OPC (e.g., missionary endeavors, transfers of members, etc.); other churches seeking an ecclesiastical relationship with the OPC are encouraged to seek membership in the ICRC and thereby enter into a relationship of Ecumenical Contact with the OPC.

With regard to those churches that are not geographically proximate to the OPC with which the OPC has a bilateral relationship, the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) shall periodically review those relationships to ascertain whether the desired substantial contact is being (or given the limited resources, is able to be) maintained. When the CEIR finds that, in God's providence, there has not been the desired significant contact for five or more years, it may propose to the upcoming General Assembly (and consult with its counterpart in the other church prior to doing so) that such Assembly inform the other church that, at the succeeding General Assembly, a proposal to adjust, without prejudice, such bilateral relationship to a relationship of Ecumenical Contact will be docketed for consideration as part of the regular annual report of the CEIR.

1. Ecclesiastical Fellowship is a relationship in which the churches involved are Reformed in their confessional standards, church order and life though there may be such differences between them that union is not possible at this time. It is to be implemented where possible and desirable by:
 - a. Exchange of fraternal delegates at major assemblies
 - b. Occasional pulpit fellowship (by local option)
 - c. Intercommunion, including ready reception of each other's members at the Lord's Supper but not excluding suitable inquiries upon requested transfer of membership, as regulated by each session (consistory)
 - d. Joint action in areas of common responsibility
 - e. Consultation on issues of joint concern, particularly before instituting changes in polity,

- doctrine, or practice that might alter the basis of the fellowship
- f. The exercise of mutual concern and admonition with a view to promoting Christian unity
 - g. Agreement to respect the procedures of discipline and pastoral concern of one another
 - h. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the major assemblies
 - i. Exchange of denominational church directories (yearbooks)
 - j. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the confessional standards
 - k. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order
 - l. Exchange of the most recent denominationally published edition of hymnals or Psalters
2. Corresponding Relations is that relationship in which mutual contact with another church is undertaken to become better acquainted with one another with a view towards entering into Ecclesiastical Fellowship at some time in the not-too-distant future. It shall be implemented where possible and desirable by:
- a. Exchange of official representatives at major assemblies
 - b. Joint action in areas of common responsibility
 - c. Consultation on issues of joint concern, particularly before instituting changes in polity, doctrine, or practice that might alter the basis of the relation
 - d. Exchange of Minutes (Acts) of the broadest assemblies
 - e. Exchange of denominational church directories (yearbooks)
 - f. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the confessional standards
 - g. Exchange of the most recently published edition of the (Book or Manual of) Church Order
 - h. Exchange of the most recent denominationally published edition of hymnals or Psalters
3. Ecumenical Contact is that relationship in which mutual contact is maintained with other member churches of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) and/or the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) with which the OPC does not presently have either Ecclesiastical Fellowship or Corresponding Relations, in fulfillment of our stated "responsibility to call all churches, including our own, to faithfulness in order to seek the unity of the whole church" (Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church, IV. 1). It shall be implemented, as appropriate, by:
- a. Meetings, both formal and informal, of delegates to the quadrennial meeting of the Conference/annual meetings of the Council
 - b. Welcome of official observers at the broadest assemblies
 - c. Communication on issues of joint concern
 - d. Mutual labors as members of the Conference/Council in discharge of the purposes of the Conference/Council