

COVER LETTER FOR PREPARING CALLS OR CONTRACTS FOR THE YEAR 2019
Great Lakes City Classis (GLCC), Reformed Church in America (RCA)

This letter and the other documents listed below (all available on the classis website) are designed to help churches within the Great Lakes City Classis in the process of preparing a call or contract for approval by the classis as required by the RCA *Book of Church Order (BCO)*. All calls and contracts (full-time and part-time) with ministers ordained in the RCA, non-RCA ordained ministers, commissioned pastors, retired ministers, seminary students, or licensed candidates seeking ordination must be approved by the consistory of the local church and by the classis, before they can be in effect. (2018 *BCO*, 1.I.2.3; 1.II.2.10; 1.II.7.8,9) Calls and contracts must be submitted to the classis clerk who will work with the Calls and Contract Approval Team (CCAT) to consider their approval, amendment, or disapproval. When you follow the guidelines approved by the classis and use the Worksheet for Calls and Contracts, the approval process goes more smoothly – you will usually receive an answer within a week.

Recent changes in insurance and retirement requirements have made the process of approving calls and contracts and considering waivers of the minimum standards for salary and benefits more important. If the classis does not fulfill its responsibility for approving calls, contracts, and waivers, it exposes the churches and the classis to the threat of lawsuits for unpaid salary and benefits, and unexpected invoices for retirement benefit payments from the RCA Board of Benefit Services (BOBS). The following documents are available on our classis website (<http://www.glcclassis.org/resources>) and are designed to help the churches within our classis in the process of approving calls, contracts, and waivers. They include:

1. 2019 Compensation Guidelines for Ministers (Minimum Salary and Benefits)
2. Call Form from the RCA *Book of Church Order (BCO)*, Formulary 5, revised 2017)
3. Comparison Chart of Calls and Contracts
4. Sample Employment Contract – a template for contracts
5. Checklist for Calls – used by the Classis CCAT
6. Checklist for Contracts – used by the Classis CCAT
7. Waiver Template for the Requirements of the Compensation Guidelines
8. Worksheet for Calls and Contracts with Ministers for 2019
9. Contract Approval Guidelines for Commissioned Pastors

Ministers may serve a local church under two conditions. First, ministers may receive a call approved by the classis and be installed in a local church. Or, ministers may serve churches under a contract approved by the classis. This distinction is particularly important when it comes to membership in the consistory and the dissolution of the pastoral relationship between a minister and a church. Installed ministers are members of the consistory; ministers who are serving under contract are not. The pastoral relationship between an installed minister and the church cannot be terminated without the approval of the classis (2018 *BCO*, 1.II.15.8); the termination of a minister under contract is determined by the provisions of the contract.

Installed ministers are further divided into two classifications: 1) solo or senior ministers, and 2) associate ministers. Ministers who serve churches under contract are divided into two classifications: 1) ministers serving a church without an installed minister on a temporary basis (may be named specialized transition ministers), and 2) assistant ministers serving on staff with a senior minister in a church. (BCO, 1.II.7.4-6, 1.II.7.9, 1.I.2.8) See the comparison chart to explore other differences between calls and contracts.

When extending a call to a minister, the consistory uses the RCA call form (Formulary 5 in the *BCO*) and adds the details of the job description and the compensation offered to the minister in the appropriate places. The call must be submitted to the classis along with the CCAT Worksheet for approval before it is sent to the minister.

When extending a contract to a minister, some of the language of the call form may be appropriate, but a contract requires language describing the dissolution of the relationship between the church and the minister working under contract. What kind of notice should be given to the minister if a church has decided to not renew a contract? What kind of severance should be given if a contract is ended before the renewal date? Although awkward to discuss in advance, clarity on these questions will prevent many headaches in the event that a contract is ended prematurely. The document, *Guidelines for Calls and Contracts*, provides some guidance in the process of writing and approving a contract.

Amendments were approved by the classes and the 2017 General Synod for incorporation into the *RCA Book of Church Order*, making it clear that this section applies to all ministers with three exceptions:

Sec. 7. A consistory shall fulfill the provisions of the call form (Appendix, Formulary No. 5) for retirement and insurance for all ministers serving the church under call or contract unless (a) regarding retirement, the minister is covered by the retirement plan sponsored by the Regional Synod of Canada or the retirement plan of the communion where the minister's membership is held, (b) the classis determines that the minister is serving the church part-time, as defined by the Board of Benefits Services, and that circumstances warrant that the consistory be exempt from this requirement, or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefits Services.

– *RCA Book of Church Order*, Chapter 1, Part I, Article 2, Section 7 (2017 edition, p. 17)

Option (b) above gives the classis the opportunity to waive the requirement for retirement and insurance benefits under some circumstances. The classis is *not* required to grant any waivers of the minimum standard for compensation (salary or benefits). As an alternative, the classis may require that the responsibilities in the call or contract be reduced to reflect the compensation level that the church is able to provide for the minister. A third option was added in 2017: “or (c) the minister is serving less than part-time as defined by the Board of Benefit Services.” The 2018 BOBS Annual Insurance and Retirement Benefits Information booklet provides this explanation: “Because different vendors have varying eligibility requirements, the

definition of part-time will vary based on the product. For life and LTD insurance purchased through the Board of Benefits Services, effective January 1, 2018, part-time is defined as those working a minimum of 17.5 hours but not more than 29 hours per week. If insurance is obtained through the RBA, its terms of participation require that any insured member must work a minimum of 20 hours per week to be enrolled in medical, dental, and vision insurance. For further clarification, contact the RBA. For life, LTD, and medical insurance, full-time is defined as anyone working a minimum of 30 hours per week or more.” Therefore, ministers working less than 17.5 hours per week are exempt from the insurance requirements, but the consistory may provide additional compensation to enable the minister to purchase insurance.

Each year our classis adopts *Compensation Guidelines for Ministers of Word and Sacrament* (as recommended by the regional synod) that provide additional guidelines for the approval of calls, contracts, and waivers. The GLCC Guidelines for Calls and Contracts and the CCAT Worksheet should be viewed as clarification for that document. Since the *Compensation Guidelines* are based on the size of the local church and the years of experience of the minister, please include this information on the Worksheet when you submit a call or contract for classis approval.

The salary, housing, arrangements for professional development, and all other benefits received by ministers or commissioned pastors serving RCA churches must meet the terms of the original call or contract, subsequent revisions thereof, and the minimum standards of the classis. (2018 BCO, 1.II.7.1n) The annual Constitutional Inquiry is designed to carry out this review for ministers and commissioned pastors with regard to their compensation. Some special situations may require an additional annual review and/or renewal by the classis (for example, churches without an installed minister or organizing churches).

The *Worksheet for Calls and Contracts with Ministers* will help you to calculate the minimum cost of the salary and benefits for a minister under call or contract and help you decide whether or not you will need to adjust the figures or apply for a waiver from the classis.

The checklists for calls and contracts used by the CCAT are provided as a way for you to check your work before you send a call or contract to the classis for approval.

If you have questions or need assistance in the writing of a call or contract, please call Howard Moths at 616-617-8578 or send an e-mail message to hmoths@rosewoodchurch.org. Please submit all requests for approval of calls or contracts to our Stated Clerk, Tricia Leistra, at tleistra@glcclassis.org.

Calls and Contract Approval Team
Great Lakes City Classis