

Changes to the Holland Classis Bylaws

Proposal #1 > Addressing Excused Absences

Members of the Classis (whether active serving ministers, commissioned pastors or elder delegates) may need to be absent from a stated session of the classis for any variety of reasons. Typically, the person will report their absence (“absent with notice”) and frequently the notice comes as a “request for an *excused absence*.” It has never been defined as to what or for what the person is being excused by the classis. Most members when communicating their regrets for their anticipated absence communicate “I’m sorry I can’t be present. Please go ahead with the meeting anyway. It’s fine with me. I trust the rest of you to make decisions.” How can such a message be addressed by the assembly?

This proposal suggests that rather than attempting to determine the motive for the absence, the assembly needs to address the message that is being sent i.e. “Please go ahead with the meeting anyway...I trust the rest of you to make decisions.” In other words, the member wants the meeting to happen but just can’t be present for it.

The reason for requesting an *excused absence* is not relevant. Therefore, with this policy, Classis is simply taking note of the effect of the absence on the Classis gathering. The approval of the *excused absence* request would lower the needed count to meet the meeting’s quorum.

Illustration: Let’s say that the Holland Classis needs a quorum of 50 ministers and 25 elders to conduct a meeting. (The quorum number is half of the 100 active-serving ministers/commissioned pastors and half of the 50 elder delegates.) Let’s then say that six ministers and four elder delegates request an excused absence (or absent with notice). With the application of this policy, the new quorum requirement is 47 ministers and 23 elder delegates. (math: $100-6=94$; $94/2=47$. $50-4=46$; $46/2=23$).

The proposal recommends a change to the Classis bylaws which enables a member who must be absent from the meeting to convey his or her support for and trust in the assembly to meet and act. The proposed change conversely allows the member to express opposition to the assembly meeting without him/her. The minister can choose to have a one-time excuse, an excuse for a period of time, or standing status. By the way, Holland Classis actually already has similar unwritten policy in actual use. We have classis members serving in other states as well as other nations. We don’t want to pay for their travel to our meetings, so we don’t expect them at our sessions. We don’t count their attendance. However, they do remain eligible to attend synod when their turn comes up.

Here’s the proposed wording to the Holland Classis Bylaws: (addition underlined, deletions strike-out)

“Voting rights are limited to elder delegates, ~~and~~ those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction of or with the approval of the Classis, and commissioned pastors. A notice of absence from a member or delegate shall be treated as a motion to be excused from the quorum count, unless the notice indicates otherwise.”

Proposal #2: Counting Attendance for Synod – Article 1.B.2

Our long-standing rule, that an absence of attendance of classis sessions in one year causes a minister to begin all over once again toward advancement of serving as a delegate to a synod, is patently unfair to our membership. The consequence is a long-term sentence for a one-year omission. It takes at least 10 to

fifteen years for a name to move from the “bottom” of this list to a place of eligibility to serve as a delegate.

The new proposal allows “the punishment to (better) fit the crime.” The minister would miss one-year’s advancement for one-year’s absence. This policy can also be applied to ministers-without-charge who under the present policy loses his/her place in rotation and have been caused to “start at the bottom.” Now a minister-without-charge (a temporary designation) would not advance that year, but keep a “place in line” when active ministry is once again engaged.

Here’s the proposed wording to the Holland Classis Bylaws: (addition underlined, deletions strike-out)

A minister ~~Ministers who has have~~ not received credit for attending a minimum of two stated sessions of the Classis in a year shall not advance for one year on the rotation list toward serving as a delegate to a General Synod or Great Lakes Synod. ~~be placed at the end of the list (as if they have just attended a General or Great Lakes Synod meeting) in the rotational system.~~ The Nominations Committee shall serve as the ruling body if a minister desires to apply for an exception to this rule due to extenuating circumstances.

Here is the broader text of the Holland Classis bylaws. Note also, that the membership category of “commissioned pastors” has also been added to the text.

Article I. Membership

- A. Membership in the Classis includes all enrolled ministers, commissioned pastors, and the elder delegates who represent all the churches within the Classis bounds. Voting rights are limited to elder delegates, ~~and~~ those enrolled ministers who are actively serving as ministers either under the jurisdiction of or with the approval of the Classis, and commissioned pastors.
- B. Attendance at Stated and Special Sessions.
 - 1. Ministers, commissioned pastors and elder delegates to the Classis are expected to attend all stated and special sessions of the Classis. A notice of absence from a member or delegate shall be treated as a motion to be excused from the quorum count, unless the notice indicates otherwise.
 - 2. A minister ~~Ministers who has have~~ not received credit for attending a minimum of two stated sessions of the Classis in a year shall not advance for one year on the rotation list toward serving as a delegate to a General Synod or Great Lakes Synod. ~~be placed at the end of the list (as if they have just attended a General or Great Lakes Synod meeting) in the rotational system.~~ The Nominations Committee shall serve as the ruling body if a minister desires to apply for an exception to this rule due to extenuating circumstances.
 - 3. Delegates from a church which is not current in the payment of its assessments (more than 60 days past due) shall not be eligible to vote at the Classis sessions. The Executive Committee may grant a waiver of this requirement at its meeting prior to a stated session of the Classis.
- C. Corresponding delegates are Associates in Ministry, licensed candidates, fraternal delegates, chairs of the Classis committees, denominational staff, regional synod staff and officers of the Classis who do not otherwise have voting rights. Corresponding delegates shall have the privilege of the floor.
- D. Retired ministers shall have the privilege of the floor. The Minister Support and Supervision Committee may designate a retired minister, who is serving under a contract, as actively serving, if the minister requests. These actively serving retired ministers shall have voting privileges, but may not represent the classis at the synods. This designation has to be made annually, since the BCO limits such contracts to one year.

Recommendation: The Overtures and Judicial Business Committee recommends these changes to the Holland Classis Bylaws be approved by the Classis.