



Constitution

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Preamble

Purpose: The purpose of this church is to glorify God through submission to His Word in true worship, proclaiming grace in Christ to sinners, and building up the saints through the proclamation of the whole counsel of God, faithful observance of Christ's sacraments, and earnest devotion to prayer.

Orderliness: In the church of God all things are to be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). This pertains to the government of the church as much as to the corporate worship of the church. For this reason, we have established this constitution.

Subordination: This constitution does not supplant Scripture, but rather is intended to express our understanding of biblical church government. While seeking to be biblical, we make no claim that every detail found here is expressly taught by Scripture nor that biblical and constitutional terminology are always interchangeable. These standards are primarily procedural; the doctrinal position of the church may be found in our Confessional Standards which include the ecumenical creeds and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647 - with stated exceptions).

Unity: This constitution should be read and used in such a way as to promote, preserve, and protect the unity of Christ's church (Eph 4:3). To that end, we must distinguish between unity and unanimity (complete agreement). Conscientious and faithful believers, including the leaders of the church, may disagree over particular wisdom decisions to be made for the direction of our local church body. When this happens, it is incumbent upon all to demonstrate the beauty and truth of Christian unity. Unity is the fruit of trusting the Lord with the direction of the church (1 Cor 3:5-17) and joyfully submitting to rightful authority, provided that their decisions are themselves in submission to the Scriptures. Such submission is not only rendered by the congregation to the elders (Heb 13:7, 17), but also by individual elders to the Session, and by the Session to the Presbytery and Council (Acts 15:2).

Denominational Affiliation: As a member congregation within the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC), we hereby adopt, by reference as part of this constitution, the constitution of the CREC, as it may be amended from time to time.

Article I: Members, Representatives, And Sacraments

Catholicity: The procedures of church membership outlined below are designed solely to maintain scriptural and accountable local church government (Heb 13:17). In no way is our practice of membership to be

construed in such a way as to disrupt our Christian unity and fellowship with saints who are faithful to their local church or with the officers of those churches (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 3:1-4).

Membership, Eligibility & Baptismal Requirements

Membership in the church is reckoned individually.

An individual may be eligible to join the church when he meets the following criteria:

Has been lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mt 28:19);

Is honoring his baptism and profession through his manner of life (Mt 7:22-23);

Is a permanent resident of our geographical region (Eph 1:1);

Is willing to submit to the government of this church (Phlm 2; Heb 13:7,17).

When someone requests baptism, the elders will baptize him at the first opportunity, with an expectation that he will pursue church membership with Holy Covenant Church or another local body. If an individual desires to be baptized, but does not intend to pursue membership, the elders will discuss membership with him before the baptism occurs. If after discussing the matter with him and he still desires baptism without becoming a member, the elders will determine if the baptism will take place and inform the individual of their decision. Normally the baptism of children is limited to those whose parents are members. The mode used will be determined by the elders through discussion with the person being baptized and/or with his parents.

For those previously baptized, the elders acknowledge their baptism as Christian when receiving them into membership. If the elders determine that their "baptism" was administered by a non-Christian sect or cult, the elders will instruct them on their responsibility to be baptized at the first opportunity (Acts 19:1-7).

When parents become members, their baptized dependent children are included as members of the congregation unless explicitly excluded. Non-baptized dependent children of member parents will become members of the congregation upon their baptism. Individuals, upon their 20th birthday will be invited to a membership class, with the goal of having them take their place more formally in the body of Christ. These individuals may not become electors if they are still dependent upon their parents.

Membership Process

When someone requests membership, they will ordinarily be required to take a membership class first. Individuals will be received into membership by the Session when they have taken membership vows (see Article I.D.). Before individuals take such vows, two or more elders must personally speak with the individual(s) and/or with the parent(s) in a household to hear of their profession(s) of faith and to ascertain that they meet the eligibility requirements. However this requirement may be set aside if there is only one local elder.

Those who were previously members of another congregation are encouraged to obtain a letter transferring their membership. Such transfers will be accepted provided the eligibility requirements are met.

Membership Vows

Normally, membership vows will be sworn publicly. During corporate worship on the Lord's Day, those becoming members will be asked the following questions:

"Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in need of salvation by Christ, and do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving and resting upon Him alone as He is offered in the gospel?"

"Have you been baptized in accordance with His Word?"

"Do you swear in the name of God, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to endeavor to live in a way that becomes a follower(s) of Christ?"

"Do you swear in the name of God to support the ministry of this church in its worship and work, submitting to its government and discipline, while pursuing its purity and peace?"

When a head of household (or a believing parent with dependent children) is asked the above questions, he will also be asked: "Are you speaking on behalf of your household?"

When affirmative answers to these questions have been given, the members of the congregation will be asked: "If you are you willing to receive [each member listed individually] into covenant

communion with you, please so signify by saying "Amen." The congregation will signify agreement with a corporate "Amen."

Membership Record Keeping: The elders will maintain a membership list, with the members of each household listed in a clear manner, including names, dates of birth and baptism, as well as when membership vows were taken. This membership list will be maintained by the elders and updated regularly in accordance with the elders' minutes, and is not to be confused with the church directory of addresses and phone numbers.

Membership and Representation: Congregational representatives are those members who are heads of households. The head of household is a married man who represents his family. In a married household, if the head of household is not a member of the congregation, then the wife is the congregational representative. All congregational representatives are expected to attend the Head of Household Meetings. These meetings will be the normal channel through which the elders and deacons: (1) report on the financial health of the church, any pastoral issues, changes to the Constitution or membership, etc. and (2) receive formal feedback from the congregation via the representatives.

Membership Removal: Members may be removed through transfer, erasure, or excommunication.

Transfer: Membership transfer is the process by which the elders entrust the spiritual care of a member to another Session of elders. If any member in good standing requests to be transferred to the care of another Christian church, the elders will transfer him with a blessing, except as noted below. Typically, the membership of dependent children under the age of twenty will be transferred with their parent(s).

If the elders judge that the church to which transfer is requested, though Christian, is not sound; or, If the elders believe the transfer request is an attempt to avoid church discipline (see Article V), then the elders will deny the request until the matter is resolved or erase their membership at the elders' discretion.

If members cease regular attendance in order to seek a new church home or to relocate from our geographical area, they are charged to transfer their membership within six months. If members fail to transfer their membership within six months of ceasing to attend, they will be erased. This will be done even if in the interim a situation arises which would normally call for the disciplinary intervention of the church.

Erasure: Erasure is the act whereby the elders in Session, by two-thirds vote and only after due pastoral pursuit and warning, as applicable (Gal 6:1), remove an individual from church membership when excommunication is either not merited or not feasible. When a member is removed in this manner the elders will: (1) Carefully record in the elders' minutes the circumstances under which a member was erased from membership and any steps that may be necessary to reinstate their membership; (2) where possible, send a copy of that statement in a letter to the person who was erased explaining their erasure; (3) inform the congregation at the next Head of Household Meeting.

Excommunication: Excommunication is the act whereby the elders remove an unrepentant individual from church membership. It is the culmination of the disciplinary process of the church (see Article V).

Access to the Lord's Supper

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the sacraments rests with the elders.

Only baptized persons will be admitted to the Lord's Supper.

Any member who is not under discipline is welcome and should partake of the Lord's Supper.

As members of the church themselves, all baptized dependent children of member parents are welcome and should partake of the Lord's Supper as able.

As fellow members of Christ's body, other baptized Christians who are not under discipline with their local church are welcome to join us at the Supper on a visiting basis.

Those who worship with us regularly and who desire to partake of the Supper on an ongoing basis, without becoming members, will be encouraged by the elders to consider becoming a member.

Article II: Selection of Elders and Deacons

Qualifications: The selection of officers to lead the church is a vital element of her corporate life. A man may be considered as a potential officer in several ways. He may aspire to the office himself (1 Tim 3:1), the elders may approach him, or the people of the church may suggest his name to the elders. Once he becomes a candidate, the elders will examine the candidate with regard to his doctrine and manner of life. If the candidate has any disagreement or mental reservation about any portion of the church's Confession of Faith or Constitution, then he must inform the elders of it. All candidates must meet the qualifications for the office set down in Scripture (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9; 1 Pet 5:2-4; 1 Tim 3:8-13; etc.).

Nomination: If by a two-thirds vote, the elders agree that, to their knowledge, the candidate is fit for office, then they will nominate him to office. Once nominated, the candidate for *elder* will work through a short course of training on eldership under the oversight of the elders. When, by a two-thirds vote of the elders, the candidate has shown his fitness for office, the elders will place his name on a ballot for the church. A nominated *diaconate* candidate will be included by the deacons in their work to prove his fitness for office (1 Tim 3:10). When, in the judgment of the deacons by a two-thirds vote, the candidate has demonstrated his fitness, the deacons will make a recommendation to the elders to place his name on a ballot. The elders must also give their consent by two-thirds vote before issuing a ballot.

Ballots: Once the elders have determined that an individual is, to their knowledge, fit for office, they will seek confirmation from the congregation through the congregational representatives. Each representative, provided he is not under formal church discipline (see Article V.B.), will receive a ballot when the elders call an election. (Those who believe they are qualified and who do not receive a ballot should contact the elders.) Each ballot will provide the option of voting either *yes*, *no*, or *abstain* with space for a brief explanation in case of a *no* or *abstain* vote. Representatives will normally have four weeks to return the ballot. After the stipulated deadline, the elders will count and weigh the feedback provided by the ballots. If the candidate receives unanimous (not counting abstentions) support of the church, the elders will ordain him. If any representative votes *no* and includes a reason for the *no* vote on the ballot, the elders must carefully weigh the scriptural merit of the objection and meet as necessary with the person who cast the *no* vote. The requirement for congregational unanimity may only be set aside by the two-thirds majority consent of the elders, and only if they have determined that the objections are unscriptural or unwarranted.

Installation: Men elected to office will be installed by the elders through the laying on of hands and prayer (cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; Acts 6:6).

Term: Once installed, the elder or deacon will serve for life, unless he resigns, is removed, or is granted a sabbatical by the elders.

Article III. Duties of Elders and Deacons

Elders: Under Christ, the authority of the local church is the board of elders or Session. (These terms are used interchangeably to refer to the duly appointed pastors, teaching elders, and ruling elders of this congregation.) In their capacity as a Session, the elders oversee all the affairs of the church, including the particular labors of teachers and ministers. The elders are collectively responsible for ruling/shepherding (1 Pet 5:1-2); equipping (Eph 4:11-12); prayer/fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3); teaching/preaching (1 Tim 5:17); administering baptism and the Lord's Table (Mt 28:19-20; 1 Cor 11:23-26); administering church discipline and restoration (1 Cor 5:1-5), and visiting the sick (Jas 5:14-15).

Delegating Responsibilities: The elders are responsible to delegate responsibilities to the deacons, hire and fire church staff, define responsibilities for church staff, and approve the annual budget. The elders also commission or license ministerial students, and oversee the course of their training for the eldership. Under the guidance and oversight of the elders, such men may perform all the various ministerial functions of elders, participation in the rule of the church excepted.

Overseeing Subordinate Ministries: By a two-thirds vote, the elders may delegate to an individual or board the executive authority of any subordinate ministry established by the elders. This executive responsibility continues at the pleasure of the elders. In order to dismiss such an individual, or remove someone from such a board, a two-thirds vote of the elders is required. If the individual concerned is also an elder, he is excluded from voting on any matters concerning his own case. If separation of a subordinate ministry from our church becomes necessary, that action may be authorized by a two-thirds vote of the elders. All formal actions concerning subordinate ministries will be entered in the minutes of the elders' meetings.

Conduct of elders' meetings: All usual business of the elders will be conducted at their regular meetings or at special meetings (called unanimously), which may be scheduled for a particular purpose. In order to establish a quorum for regular business, a majority of the elders must be present. In all meetings of the Session, each elder has one vote. Unless otherwise stated, decisions of the elders in their meetings require a two-thirds vote to pass. This threshold is met only when the number of votes cast for the motion divided by the number of total votes cast equals or exceeds two-thirds.

The elders will appoint one of their number to moderate the meetings, and one to record the minutes.

Responsibilities of individual elders: Individual elders are responsible for those duties delegated to them by the body of elders, and recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts and desires.

Distinct Callings: All the elders share the same rank and authority. Nevertheless, the church acknowledges the variety of gifts and callings among the elders, some of whom are particularly ordained to the labor of word and doctrine (cf. Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11-12; 1 Tim 5:17-18; Heb 13:7,17; 1 Pet 5:2-4). For clarity's sake, therefore, our church recognizes distinct callings related to the Session of elders for this local church. Some are called to a pastoral ministry of the Word and Sacraments and named by us ministers or pastors. Others are called to a didactic ministry of the Word and named teachers or teaching elders. Still others are called to government and rule according to the Word and named rulers or ruling elders. The names used for these callings are descriptive only, not titular or honorific (Mt 23:8-10). Each elder will have his particular calling acknowledged by the elders in Session.

Compensation: Those elders whose assigned duties preclude them from providing for their families in the ordinary way must be compensated by the church (1 Cor 9:1-18; 1 Tim 5:17-18).

Deacons: Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons are responsible, as much as is practicable, to manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church. Such responsibilities are assigned by the elders and may include preparing and administering the annual budget as well as administering building maintenance, fellowship meals, subordinate ministries, and the Diaconal Fund(s). The deacons' goal is to enable the elders to focus on their God-given priorities (Acts 6:2-4).

Conduct of deacons' meetings: All usual business of the deacons will be conducted at their regular meeting, or at a special meeting called for a particular purpose. The deacons will appoint one of their number to moderate the meetings of the deacons. The deacons will be prepared to give a general report of their work at the elders' request.

Responsibilities of individual deacons: Individual deacons are responsible for those duties assigned to them by the deacons, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts and desires. There is no distinction of rank among the deacons.

Diaconal Fund(s): The Deacons' Fund is available to members of the church to meet financial needs of an urgent or ongoing nature, including expenses related to the costs of Christian education. The deacons may also use these funds to provide emergency help to non-members. With a two-thirds approval of the elders, the deacons may establish other funds to finance specific objectives. At all times, the deacons are responsible to maintain the biblical standards of money, charity, work, and related issues (Gal 6:10; 2 Thes 3:4-16; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 5:3-4, 8; Is 10:1-4).

Article IV: Resignation or Removal of Elders and Deacons

Resignation of Elders or Deacons: If an elder or deacon desires to resign his office or take a leave of absence, he will present a letter expressing this desire and explaining his reasons to the elders. The elders

will notify the congregation at the next Head of Household Meeting of their receipt of the letter and their proposed course of action. If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral failure or doctrinal deviance, the resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate biblical discipline (cf. 1 Tim 5:20).

Accusation of Impropriety: If a member of the congregation believes an elder or deacon may be morally or doctrinally unfit for his office, the scriptural requirement for him is clear: he is to approach that officer individually first (Mt 18:15), and then with one or two others (Mt 18:16). If the problem remains, then the individual, with the two or three witnesses, should come to the elders and present the charges (1 Tim 5:19).

Investigation by the Session: If the Session (excluding any accused elder) decides by a two-thirds vote that the question merits an investigation and/or trial, then the Session will (a) inform the congregational representatives of the nature of the charges, (b) announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or trial, and (c) encourage the congregational representatives to attend.

Public Rebuke and/or Removal from Office: If the charges are sustained by a two-thirds vote of the elders (excluding any elder being tried), then the elder or deacon, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction, may be rebuked in the presence of the congregation (1 Tim 5:20), or may be removed from the office of elder or deacon (1 Tim 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9), or both. The officer retains the right of appeal to Presbytery and Council as per the CREC constitution.

Article V: Church Discipline

Informal Church Discipline: The ordinary course of discipline in a healthy church body is informal. Members are encouraged to self-discipline (2 Pet 1:5-7), overlooking the failings of others in love (1 Pet 4:8), and encouraging other members to covenant faithfulness by confronting brothers and sisters who are in sin and bringing along witnesses when necessary (Mt 18:15, 16). The goal of such informal discipline is for members to help one another pursue that "holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Typically, only in cases of unrepentant sin or open and scandalous sin, is it necessary for members to bring a matter to the attention of the elders.

Formal Church Discipline: Formal church discipline is the process by which the elders of the church endeavor to correct unrepentant or scandalous sin within the congregation. Such discipline will be pursued only after the elders have diligently inquired into the matter and determined that there are clear grounds for censure based on at least two or three witnesses. Such discipline is applied through the formal action and judgment of the elders established by a two-thirds vote. The pattern of formal church discipline will normally include (1) private admonishment by the elders, (2) formal public admonishment and suspension from the Supper (also called barring from the Table, 2 Thes 3:14-15), and (3) excommunication or being put out of the church (Mt 18:17) and delivered over to Satan (1 Cor 5:4,5; 1 Tim 1:20). When a member has willfully left off meeting with the church, or has made it known he has no intention of fulfilling his church vows, then the elders may erase him from the rolls (see Article I.G.b). In such cases, erasure is an act of discipline.

Subjects of Church Discipline: All members of our church are subject to formal church discipline. Those who attend regularly (but are non-members) can be subject to pastoral admonishment. If such an individual over time refuses to become a member of the church, or is divisive, heretical, scandalous, or factious, the elders may bar him from the Lord's Supper and prohibit him from participating in worship after proper admonition (Tit 3:10-11). If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to our church, then the Session will normally honor the discipline of the other church. No discipline will be set aside unless, by a two-thirds vote, the Session determines, after due consultation with the officers of the church which applied the discipline, that they acted without adequate grounds.

Procedures for Church Discipline: In conscious submission to Scriptural principles (outlined in Mt 18:15-20), the elders shall establish the specific procedures for all formal discipline on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, under normal circumstances, these

procedures should include a clear and timely warning of the individual that he is in the process of formal discipline, two or three visits or communications involving two or three witnesses, and clear records and/or minutes of the entire proceedings kept by the elders. These normal procedures are outlined in the "Policy on Church Discipline."

Appeals to Presbytery: Members of our church may appeal the actions of the Session to the presbytery and/or council of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. Any appeals to presbytery will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the CREC.

Restoration of the Party Disciplined: The goal of formal church discipline is restorative not punitive. When, by a two-thirds vote, the elders determine that the one under discipline has repented, a statement of his repentance will be read to the congregation, the elders shall formally announce the end of the discipline, and he will be restored to fellowship.

Article VI. The Church and Laws of Incorporation

Jesus the Head of the Church: As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, this church is not constituted or incorporated by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church.

Non-profit Status: In order to establish a bank account and assure that members' tithes and offerings are tax-deductible in the State of Washington, Holy Covenant Church has, for legal and administrative purposes *only*, been recognized by Washington State as a non-profit religious organization.

Protest of Civil Regulation: As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, this church submits to the burdens and entanglements of civil regulation and taxation such as its incorporation status under protest.

Article VII. Amendments to this Constitution

Amendment Process: This Constitution may be amended at any time through a two-thirds vote of the elders, when the following conditions have been first fulfilled:

There is a first reading of the proposed change at a Head of Household Meeting.

A copy of the proposed change(s) is (are) made available to the congregational representatives.

The elders seek due consultation with the congregational representatives of the church at a subsequent Head of Household Meeting.

1. When the elders determine by a two-thirds vote that the proposed changes are non-substantial and related only to improving the clarity, formatting, punctuation, or organization of the Constitution, they need not follow the above process but may simply report the changes at the next Head of Household Meeting.

Fallible Document: We confess that this Constitution is a fallible work of fallible men and, if obedience to Scripture requires it, may be set aside without the process of amendment by a two-thirds vote of the elders. Under such circumstances, the congregational representatives will be informed, and the Constitution amended at the first opportunity.

Adopted November 2023.