

Covenant Reformed Church

Fairbanks, Alaska

Constitution

Article I: Name and Affiliation

The name of this local church body shall be Covenant Reformed Church (hereinafter, CRC), and it shall be affiliated with the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC).

Article II: Purpose

CRC exists as a local expression of the universal church of Jesus Christ, established by the sovereign work of the Triune God through the propitiatory work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, and the constituting work of the Holy Spirit (I Cor 12:13).

The primary objective of CRC is to celebrate and advance the crown rights of King Jesus, proclaiming him to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Her members seek to do this by living and teaching in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, which are the only reliable source of true knowledge and wisdom throughout the ages.

Article III: Standards

Section I: The Trinity

We believe in the Triune God, Creator of all things, self-existing, self-sufficient and self-revealing, being one God in three distinct Persons. We affirm the Creator-creature distinction and the fact that God alone is Sovereign over all creation. We reject any notion of man's right or ability to share in God's sovereign authority.

Section II: The Holy Scriptures

We hold the Scriptures, contained in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, to be the unerring and infallible Word of God. The Bible is, therefore, our sole basis of authority both for belief and practice.

Section III: Creation

We believe that when the Bible describes God's work of creation, the words are to be taken at face value. We therefore hold to the historic view of creation in six sequential days of common length, several millennia in the past. This position is the most consistent way to understand the content of Westminster Confession IV.1 and we reject the notion that either Genesis 1 or Confession IV should be interpreted in any other manner.

Section IV: Secondary Standards

We hold to the three ecumenical creeds of the early Christian church; the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Definition of Chalcedon.

We believe that the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Standards (consisting of the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms) accurately reflects the teaching of the Word of God, and is therefore a worthy guide to sound doctrine and godly living. Apart from the qualifications set forth below, the Westminster Standards are to be used to instruct the faithful in Christian belief. Holding to the Westminster Standards does not mean that we believe they necessarily formulate each doctrine in the best manner, nor that they are exhaustive statements of the doctrines confessed, nor that they address every teaching of Scripture or condemn every error of human interpretation.

Qualifications:

1. Nothing in the Westminster Standards is to be so construed as to limit the efficacy of the gospel in this age. We believe the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes and that the Great Commission was given to the church to carry out. We believe that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church (Rom. 1:16; Matt. 28:18-20; 16:13-20).
2. Those portions of the Westminster Standards dealing with communicant members are not to be construed in such a way as to forbid the full benefits of covenant membership to duly baptized members of covenant households. We believe that, under the New Testament administration of the covenant of grace, God has given two signs and seals of the covenant: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Therefore:
 - a. We believe that all professors of faith in Jesus Christ and their children, are entitled to the waters of baptism and are under obligation to enter therein.
 - b. We believe that all baptized professors of faith in Jesus Christ and their baptized children are invited by Christ to partake of His supper.
 - c. We believe that those who show by their life and words that they are covenant-despisers or blasphemous rejecters of God and His Word are to be barred from the Table after due process.
3. Regarding the Mosaic judicial laws, we note that Confession XIX treats them differently from the ordinances governing the sacrificial system, saying that the former have "expired" except for their "general equity," whereas the latter are "abrogated." We clarify our belief that congregations of Christ's church may hold faithfully to the teachings of the Confession and

yet remain free to understand “general equity” in a way that gives guidance to civil government and instruction for civic righteousness.

4. Regarding the so-called “Regulative Principle” of worship, we reject the idea that Confession XXI.1 must be narrowly construed so that it precludes such practices as singing hymns, using certain musical instruments or similar practices.
5. The consanguinity provisions of Confession XXIV.4 go beyond the standards set forth in God’s word, specifically in the last sentence of the section. We therefore reject, as binding, the last sentence.
6. Confession XXV.6 specifically identifies the “Pope of Rome” as “that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition . . .” While we affirm that church leaders may, from time to time, pit themselves against God and his eternal Word and so exhibit the “spirit of antichrist,” we do not affirm a strict identification between the Pope and “the” Antichrist.
7. Confession XXVII says, in part, “neither of [the sacraments] may be dispensed by any but by a minister of the word, lawfully ordained.” We clarify our belief that all lawfully ordained elders of the church, whether or not they possess seminary training, are authorized by Scripture to administer the sacraments. We deny that formal academic degrees are a Biblical criterion for lawful ordination, so long as ordained elders are well-equipped in the knowledge of sound doctrine and have demonstrated their ability to serve the church as faithful defenders of the flock and of the once-delivered faith. We therefore assert that it is permissible for the sacraments to be administered under the oversight of any lawfully ordained elder of the church.

While our subscription is to the Westminster Standards we also affirm the value of the Scottish and continental expressions of the Reformation. We assert that the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the First and Second Helvetic Confessions, the First and Second Scotch Confessions, and the Canons of the Synod at Dort are to be consulted and utilized as valuable expressions of the true Christian faith.

Section IV: Denominational Affiliation

As a member congregation within the 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 IV: The Congregation

Section I: Membership

The membership of Covenant Reformed Church shall consist of those who have been baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; are actively seeking to live godly lives in obedience to the Word of God; and who have entered into covenant with CRC as a local assembly of God's people.

If a person seeks membership at CRC while under the lawful discipline of another church, the Session must fully investigate the circumstances, including interviewing the potential member and making appropriate and diligent inquiry of the officials of the disciplining church (*cf.* Deut 13:14; 19:15). Only when the Session is fully satisfied that the person is morally free to join CRC shall the Session implement the process of receiving the person into CRC's membership. Great pastoral care shall be exercised in such matters, with proper deference given to the larger Body of Christ.

The Session shall develop, publish and maintain a covenant agreement which, when signed by a prospective member, shall be the final step in becoming a member of CRC. All members, to be eligible to vote, must have signed the covenant. However,

in the case of a husband and wife, one (normally the husband) may sign on behalf of the family.

All members, including the baptized children of covenanted members, have rights of access to the full life and privileges of the church, so long as they remain in good standing. Only covenanted members in good standing who have attained the age of 20 years are entitled to vote on church matters that may, from time to time, come before the congregation.

Matters subject to a congregational vote shall be the election of officers, including all ministerial staff (pastors), and the adoption of or amendments to this constitution. A minimum of 85% approval by voting members available to vote shall be necessary to pass any measure. All other matters are under the purview of the Session of Elders and are not subject to a vote of the congregation.

Section II: Leadership and Governance

Church Officers: CRC shall be governed by a Session of Elders, consisting of a minimum of two men, duly qualified, ordained and installed. If, at any time, CRC does not have two or more installed elders (including one or more installed pastors), she shall remedy the situation in accordance with the CREC Constitution and Book of Procedures.

Session of Elders: The Session shall consist of all duly elected, ordained and installed Pastors and Elders, each of whom shall serve a perpetual term. Elders shall be men who are approved of by the congregation, declared qualified by the Session and worthy of imitation (Heb 13:7). The Session shall bear sole responsibility for the governance of the congregation; the care of souls as under-shepherds of Christ's flock; the coordination of public worship and other religious activities; and fiduciary duties on behalf of CRC.

Diaconate: The Diaconate shall consist of all duly elected, ordained and installed Deacons, each of whom shall serve a perpetual term. Deacons shall be men who are approved of by

the congregation, declared qualified by the Session and worthy of imitation (Heb 13:7). Diaconal responsibilities include the administration and oversight of the temporal affairs of the church; care for the poor, sick, friendless and needy; to promote a spirit of hospitality and liberality among the members; and other duties as assigned by the Session, to whom they are accountable.

Selection, ordination and installation of officers:

1. CRC shall select, train and subsequently ordain and install men as elders (including pastors) and deacons for service in the church. The Session shall bear the responsibility for ensuring that men recommended to the church as potential officers satisfy the qualification requirements set forth in Scripture in such passages as I Timothy 3, Titus 1, I Peter 5, Acts 6 and Numbers 11.
2. The Session shall produce, publish and maintain manuals of training and conduct for elders and deacons, and shall ensure that procedures set forth in said manuals are followed in these matters.
3. Congregational votes to elect elders (including pastors) and deacons shall be conducted in a manner to be determined by the Session, provided that it must be consistent with obtaining wise and informed consent from the congregation and with all applicable provisions of this constitution.

Removal from office

1. An officer who, by his conduct, including a violation of his vows, shall display unfitness for office may be suspended or removed from office by vote of the Session. Such action may be initiated by members of the Session or by complaint from members of the congregation. However, to bring a charge potentially leading to removal from office, the complainant (whether or not a member of the Session) must have

two or more witnesses (including the complainant) to the circumstances upon which the complaint is based (I Timothy 5:19; Deut 19:15; Matt 18:16). To satisfy this requirement, the two witnesses may not be husband and wife.

2. Before an officer can be removed, he is entitled to due process, including a hearing before the Session to defend himself against the charges. He is also entitled to defense counsel and to call witnesses in his defense. If the Session cannot muster two or more impartial members of Session to hear the case (I Timothy 5:21), it must call for the assistance of other ordained men to help try the case. Preference will be given to calling upon other CREC elders or pastors, but if none are available, trusted ordained men of another Reformed denomination may be called upon.
3. If an officer has been found guilty of sin leading to his removal from office, he shall be rebuked before the church (I Timothy 5:20) and the circumstances of his removal shall be stated, with due regard to propriety, especially as to necessary protection of innocent individuals affected by the man's sins.
4. If an officer has been found guilty of sin, but the Session has concluded the matter does not demand his immediate removal from office, he shall be rebuked before the church (I Timothy 5:20) and the circumstances shall be stated, with due regard to propriety, especially as to necessary protection of innocent individuals affected by the man's sins. Thereafter, the officer shall serve in probationary status for a period to be determined by the Session (Gal 6:1; Heb 12:6-8; Prov 29:17).

Leaves of absence

A member of Session or of the Diaconate may, upon request, be granted a specified temporary or a long-term leave of absence. In deciding whether to grant a leave of absence, the Session shall consider the reasons and circumstances on a case-by-case basis. The decision shall be announced to the congregation in a timely manner.

Leaves of absence for members of Session or the Diaconate may also be granted upon the initiation of Session at their discretion. Reasons must be given to the elder or deacon but may be withheld from the congregation if, in the judgment of Session, harm would be done to the officer or his family by disclosure of the reasons. The fact of the leave of absence must, however, be revealed to the congregation in a timely manner. This process may not be used to cover up sinful behavior that could lead to censure or dismissal. Pastoral wisdom must be carefully applied in cases of discretionary leaves of absence.

The decision to restore an officer to active service after a leave of absence is at the sole discretion of the Session.

Section III: Church Discipline

Members are strongly encouraged to resolve matters of sin and offense between themselves informally and privately (Matthew 18:15), exercising charity toward one another (I Peter 4:8), forgiving one another and covering minor offenses in love, to the extent possible.

A member accused of egregious and unrepented sin may be brought before the Session in a final attempt to bring him or her to repentance. The steps outlined in Matthew 18:15-16 must have been followed and documented before the complaint can be brought to the Session (Matthew 18:17). Any such complaint must be testified to by two or more witnesses (Deut 19:15; Matt

18:16). To satisfy this requirement the two witnesses may not be husband and wife.

Before a formal trial can be held on any charges that could lead to excommunication, the Session shall give the accused clear and timely warning that charges are pending and that a process of formal church discipline has commenced. After notification of pending charges, the Session shall, within a reasonable time, present to the accused formal charges that include specifications, so that the accused may clearly understand the subject matter of the accusation(s) and prepare his defense.

A member under formal discipline or after having been notified of pending charges may not be transferred to another church without a unanimous vote of the Session, which would further require a decision to drop or suspend the charges.

If, after having been confronted with charges, the accused repents and demonstrates fruits of repentance, the charges may be dropped by the Session and a process of reconciliation may begin (Gal 6:1; Heb 12:6-8; Prov 29:17). At the discretion of the Session, reconciliation may or may not include a public statement of repentance and a joyful service of restoration.

If the case proceeds to trial, the accused shall be summoned to trial on a date certain. The accused is entitled to due process, and shall be given an opportunity to defend himself or herself against the charges. The person is entitled to defense counsel and to call witnesses in his or her defense. The accused shall also be given an opportunity to question witnesses against the accused at the trial. If any witness is a minor, the Session must take appropriate precautions to protect the witness.

If an accused person refuses to attend trial after having been summoned, he or she shall be charged with contumacy and tried *in absentia* on that charge only.

If a guilty verdict is reached, censure, up to and including excommunication, shall be declared. Excommunication shall be testified to by a writ, which shall be delivered to the guilty party

and announced to the congregation on the Sunday following publication of the writ. The writ of excommunication shall be made available to the congregation upon request and, at the discretion of the Session, may be provided to other churches as deemed appropriate to protect the broader church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Documentation of formal discipline cases is required. Trial records shall be kept and maintained in church files for at least 10 years after the trial's conclusion. Records may be preserved in either printed or electronic form.

Non-members of CRC who regularly attend are not subject to the formal discipline of the church, but may be pastorally admonished, either privately or publically at the discretion of the Session. Such admonition may include refusal to continue allowing the non-members access to the Lord's Table. However, if such action is taken, it does not constitute excommunication and the non-members are free to go worship elsewhere without censure. At the discretion of the Session, non-members may be asked to stop attending the worship services and other activities of CRC.

Section IV: Termination of membership

A member's membership may be terminated in the following ways:

1. Excommunication. This is the most severe form of church discipline and constitutes a declaration that the person is no longer a member of the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a declaration of covenantal death (Prov 15:10) and should therefore only be executed in cases of egregious sin of which the person remains unrepentant. It must always follow due process and should be accompanied by congregational grief and prayers that the person will come to his senses and repent, so that he may be restored to the church.

2. Transfer. A member in good standing may, upon request, be transferred to another faithful, Bible believing congregation in the Church of Jesus Christ. The potential reasons for such a transfer may be many and diverse. Normally, when a person requests transfer, it will be granted graciously and with prayers and blessings. However, CRC may not transfer a member to a church that holds to heretical doctrines or ungodly practices. Nor may she transfer members to groups that are cultic and/or do not hold to the historic Christian faith as articulated in the ecumenical confessions mentioned in Article III, Section III of this constitution.
3. Release. A member may be released to join another congregation that does not have a defined membership or does not receive transfers as a matter of policy or practice. Before granting such a release, the Session shall satisfy itself that the member will be cared for spiritually by the receiving congregation, and that the receiving congregation holds to the ecumenical creeds mentioned in Article III, Section III of this constitution.
4. Release with censure. A member may be released to join another congregation that does not have a defined membership, does not receive transfers as a matter of policy or practice, or whose doctrines and practices are suspect. If the Session is not satisfied that the member will be cared for spiritually by the receiving congregation, or that the receiving congregation's position with respect to the ecumenical creeds mentioned in Article III, Section III of this constitution is suspect, the member may be released with censure. This amounts to a strong, written admonition that the member's soul is in danger by leaving to attend such a

congregation. A release with censure is a mild form of church discipline.

5. Erasure. If a member leaves the immediate geographic area of CRC, including departure from the State of Alaska, or if CRC simply cannot determine where the person has disappeared to, erasure becomes an option. In this case, the Session should make at least two attempts to contact the person and urge him to join another faithful church. If contact is lost, then after a period of six months since the last contact, the member's name shall be erased from the membership rolls. Erasure is not a form of discipline, but if the person returns after he has been erased and wants to restore his membership at CRC, he shall be treated as someone coming into membership for the first time.