

Constitution of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church

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Constitution of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church

Preamble

We confess the purpose of this church is to glorify God through submission to His Word in reverent worship, proclaiming the gospel of Christ to sinners, and building up the saints through the preaching of the whole counsel of God and faithful observance of Christ's sacraments. In the church of God all things are to be done decently and in order. This pertains to the government of the church as much as to the corporate worship of the church. Convinced that Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, will protect and guide us, we seek to obey Scripture through the following standards for the orderly and scriptural government of our church, Covenant Heritage Reformed Church in Yorktown, Virginia. These standards do not supplant Scripture, but rather are an expression of our understanding of biblical church government under God. While seeking to be biblical in structure, we make no claim that every detail found here is expressly taught by Scripture, although that would certainly be our goal.

Article I: Definition of Goals

A. Name

This church body shall be known as Covenant Heritage Reformed Church (CHRC).

B. Purpose

1. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church is a body of Christian believers who are called out of the world and united for the chief purposes of glorifying and enjoying the Triune God by proclaiming and obeying His word as it is revealed in the primary standard of the Old and New Testament Scriptures.
2. This congregation is organized as a church exclusively for charitable, religious, and educational purposes including, but not limited to, such purposes: the establishing and maintaining of religious worship, the building of churches, the evangelizing of the unsaved by the proclaiming of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the educating of believers in a manner consistent with the requirements of Holy Scripture, and the maintaining of missionary activities in the United States and any foreign country.

C. Objectives

1. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church's general objectives are to promote submission to God's Word in all areas of human life and endeavor, to nurture and to educate believers and their households in the Christian faith, to make disciples of all nations, to administer the sacraments and moral discipline within the church, and to lead the congregation in united worship, encouragement, fellowship, charitable service, and ministry to the body of Christ.
2. CHRC has a special interest in working with other Christian churches and groups throughout our community and the world. We welcome opportunities to labor with them in common goals in the name of Christ. In addition, we look forward to entering into informal and/or formal fellowship and association with like-minded churches who have common aims, standards, and objectives.
3. CHRC has a special interest in teaching and promoting reformed distinctives that are being forgotten in many churches, such as:
 - a. CHRC intends to be ruled through a Presbyterian form of government and to guard against tendencies to emulate both congregational and hierarchical governments.
 - b. CHRC teaches that God enters into covenantal relationships with individuals and with groups.
 - c. CHRC is patriarchal, teaching that males are to hold the roles of leadership in the home and church. This includes an emphasis on equipping men to be heads of households and lead worship in the families. We believe this will result in strong families, incorporation of the whole

family in the worship and work of the church, and allow our families to be our key evangelistic tool.

- d. CHRC teaches that all areas of life are under the authority of Jesus Christ and are to be brought into conformance with Scripture. No areas of life are beyond the sphere of biblical influence or are morally neutral. This includes the necessity of a distinctly Christian education for our covenant children.

Article II: Statement of Faith and Standards

Should any conflict arise between this Constitution and any of the standards (or between the standards themselves), the controlling authority for resolution of the conflict shall be, in this order: a.) Scriptures; b.) the Westminster Confession of Faith; and c.) this Constitution. The elders (hereafter known as the Session) shall adjudicate and resolve alleged conflicts (or controversies pertaining to such allegations) and shall always be the first court of adjudication.

A. Statement of Faith

The Old and New Testament Scriptures, made up of the 66 canonical books, are the inspired rule of faith and practice for the Christian and in the original autographs are the only inerrant, unchallengeable authority and supreme judge to which all religious controversies, religious creeds, opinions, and regulations of men must be subordinate.

B. Historic Creeds

The Word of God is our only infallible and inerrant rule of faith and life. Yet, in Scripture there is abundant proof attesting to the value of the use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms. *Creed* is a term from the Latin, *credo*, "I believe." *Confession* is based on the Greek, *homologeō*, "I confess." The term *catechism* is also from a Greek word, *katacheō*, "to answer, to echo."

In the expanse of the church's history, the affirmations of our faith have been as simple as "Jesus is Lord" (Acts 10:36, 1Cor. 12:3, Phil. 2:11) in the face of those who would require, "Caesar is Lord." They have been as detailed as the Westminster Confession with an unparalleled definitiveness. And they have expressed the faith as personally and warmly as the Heidelberg Catechism.

A strong Biblical basis may be gleaned for creedal statements and confessions of faith. They function to summarize biblical truths (1 Tim. 3:16) and "retain the standard of sound words" (II Tim. 1:13). They are used as means of confessing the gospel faith in a formal way at baptism, ordination, and similar times of spiritual significance (1Tim.. 4:14, 6:12; Acts 8:12). They are used to confess the true faith as a conscious act of the persevering believer to follow and hold fast Christ, especially in public worship (Heb. 4:14, 10:23, 3:10). Paul calls the church to teach in this way with a view toward achieving full understanding (1 Cor. 14:9; Gal. 6:6).

The Session of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church sincerely receives and adopts the essential tenets of the Christian faith as expressed in the following creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Apart from the exceptions indicated below, we take these as historic, authentic, and reliable summaries of what Scripture, our only infallible rule, teaches. These doctrinal symbols express the system of doctrine contained in the Scriptures. As such, they function in our congregation to indicate the boundaries of orthodoxy for our confession, and they inspire us to a clear grasp and expression of our faith in historically and theologically informed language.

We wish to qualify the spirit of our confessional use. There are two extremes to avoid. On the one hand the church must avoid an anti-creedal spirit which tends to be irrational, ignorant, and ungrateful for the church's history of defending the truth from error by the use of creeds. Throughout the history of the Church many have claimed to submit to the literal words of the Bible, but cannot withstand a precise confessional statement that accurately states the doctrines clearly taught in Scripture. The anti-creedal

spirit turns out to be prideful as well. This is evident when one pridefully stands, even independently of the church's teachers of past ages, to ferret all the riches of God's Word having no regard for the past (teaching) gifts of God to the church. On the other hand, the Church must avoid a creedalistic-subscriptionalistic stance that tends to undermine or set creeds and confessions on equal par with the Bible, if not theoretically, then functionally. On the contrary, Scripture is the only infallible Word. By holding a creedalistic-subscriptionalistic stance we often thereby impede the diligent study of the Word and even progress in applying the Word to our own day. The attitude the church should take is that the statements of the good creeds, confessions, and catechisms are verbal distillations of the truths of the Word of God and are thus, "trustworthy statements deserving full acceptance" (I Tim. 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; II Tim. 2:11; Tit. 3:8). What we must ever demand is their lucid formulation of the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3).

We believe that the Westminster Confession of Faith as adopted in Scotland in 1647 and amended in the American Presbyterian church in 1788 is the clearest and most definitive statement of Biblical doctrine yet produced by the Church. Therefore, wherever other of our creeds and catechisms disagree, we yield to the Westminster Confession's doctrinal views, unless a specific exception is noted to the Westminster Confession (below). Nevertheless, we believe there is much value in expressly including other documents in this book of confessions. The Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed, and Definition of Chalcedon ground our confession as catholic and ancient in character. In this we show substantial doctrinal unity with all Protestant, and in respect to basic doctrines, even Romanist, and Eastern communions. We believe that the Shorter Catechism is a marvelous tool for grasping Biblical doctrine in definitive terms and we heartily encourage the use of this in the task of the Christian nurture of our families. The Three Forms of Unity, show our high appraisal of the Continental Reformed traditions. We especially appreciate and utilize regularly in worship the Heidelberg Catechism that expresses the faith in covenantal and personal warmth. Included also is the Chicago Statement (1978) on Inerrancy in what is expressed in the Summary and Affirmations. This work of conservative evangelical Church scholars was the product of decades of liberal-modernist struggle which ravaged most of the mainline churches. By including this we confess our high view of Scripture and acknowledge the need for ongoing confessional considerations in response to heretical departures from orthodoxy.

Our Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms

The Apostles' Creed (ca 2nd Century)
The Nicene Creed (381)
Definition of Chalcedon (451)
The Three Forms of Unity (1618)
The American Westminster Confession of Faith (1788)
The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)
The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647)
The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy (1978)

C. Westminster Confession of Faith (1788) and Exceptions

1. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church stands within the confessional standards and traditions of the Reformed churches of the Protestant Reformation, and embraces the Westminster Confession of Faith as adopted in Scotland in 1647 and amended in the American Presbyterian church in 1788 as its formal creed and secondary standard of doctrine and life.
2. While we agree with the system of doctrine taught in the WCF, we do not always agree with how those doctrines are supported with the Scripture proof texts which the Westminster Divines cited. We also do not agree with the Westminster Standards in the following areas:
 - a. Chapter 21, Paragraph 5: We believe that hymns and spiritual songs are also appropriate for use in worship.
 - b. Chapter 21, Paragraph 8: We believe that along with works of piety, necessity, and mercy, the command also allows us to rest physically on the Sabbath. We also believe the intention of Scripture was not to exclude recreation, especially in the context of the fellowship of God's people.

- c. Chapter 24, Paragraph 4: We deny the prohibition contained in the last sentence, prohibiting marriage to the close kin of a spouse.
- d. Chapter 25, Paragraph 6: While we affirm that the Pope of Rome is anti-Christian, we do not believe him necessarily to be The Antichrist.
- e. Chapter 27, Paragraph 4: We understand the phrase “minister of the Word” to mean any lawfully ordained elder.
- f. Chapter 28, Paragraph 2: We understand the phrase “minister of the gospel” to mean any lawfully ordained elder.
- g. Chapter 29, Paragraph 3: We understand the word “ministers” to mean lawfully ordained elders.
- h. Chapter 29, Paragraph 7: We believe “worthy receivers” are all baptized members of the Church, provided they are not under discipline.

Article III: Membership

A. Determination of Members

The following procedures of membership are designed solely for the purpose of maintaining scriptural and accountable local church government (Hebrews 13:17), such that our affairs are conducted in decency and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). Our practice of membership does not interfere with our Christian unity and fellowship with true saints who are members of other churches (Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 3:1–4).

1. Normally, membership in the community of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church will be reckoned by household and, on an individual basis, by baptism. A household (including all family members except those who deny the faith through willful rebellion) will be eligible when the head of the household has made a credible profession of faith and has been duly baptized. Although the believing husband is normally designated as the head of household, a widow or single mother may also be so designated. If a believing wife has an unbelieving husband, she shall be considered the head of the household for the purpose of church membership only.
 - a. The Session of the church recognizes, through admitting the head of the household into such membership, that he is responsible before God with and to the Session for the spiritual condition of that household. While CHRC officially teaches and encourages infant baptism and paedocommunion, the elders respect the spiritual responsibility of the head of the household. The head of the household therefore normally makes recommendations to the Session concerning members of the household on such matters as baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, under the headship of Christ, the administration of church sacraments remains with the elders, who may also make recommendations to the head of household.
 - b. Members of households who have been baptized and have come to the Lord's Table are communicant members of the church. Baptized household members who have not come to the Lord's Table are considered non-communicant members. Those members of member households who have not been baptized are not recognized by the Session as members of the church, although they are related to the church and set apart to Christ through their being joined together in a member household (1 Corinthians 7:14).
 - c. When an un-baptized child comes to faith in the Lord, the parents will notify the Session to arrange for a baptism, after which the child may come to the Lord's Table. Any baptized child may partake of the Lord's Table, provided the parents instruct the child at each observation of the Supper.

- d. If an individual has made a credible profession of faith and has been duly baptized but has no family, or is a child of unbelieving parents, then he will be included as an individual member of our church.
2. The Session may admit eligible households and/or individuals into membership in Covenant Heritage Reformed Church based upon the positive testimony of at least two elders who have personally spoken with the head of the household or the individual(s) seeking membership in Covenant Heritage Reformed Church, and who have heard their credible profession of faith, ascertained that they have been lawfully baptized by a Christian church, and have good confidence that those seeking membership will fulfill the membership vows of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church. Letters of transfer from another Christian church will be accepted, but will not mitigate the requirement to meet with elders. Membership may be identified through profession of faith, reaffirmation of faith, or transfer of membership from another congregation of the Christian church.
3. The Session will maintain a membership list, with the members of each household listed in a clear manner, including names, dates of birth, with yes/no entries for baptism, profession of faith, and communicant status. This membership list will be maintained by the Session, and is not to be confused with the church directory of addresses and phone numbers.
4. Because water baptism is required of those seeking membership, the guidelines of Article X.B. will apply.

B. Membership Questions

When the criteria listed above have been fulfilled, a household or individual will be formally received into the membership of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church before the congregation on the Lord's Day in the following manner:

1. An elder will ask the individual or head of household the following questions:
 - a. **Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?**
 - b. **Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?**
 - c. **Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?**
 - d. **Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?**
 - e. **Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?**

When the questions are addressed to the head of a household, he may speak on behalf of the household (Joshua 24:15), or the entire household may wish to speak their profession (Romans 10:9).

2. When an affirmative answer has been given, the presiding elder will ask the members of the church the following question: **"As a congregation of Christ, do you receive [this Christian/these Christians] into the covenant fellowship of this local church together with you, renewing your own membership vows as you do so?"**
3. One of the elders will offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

C. Expectations of Members

1. Members of CHRC shall devote themselves to both the private and public means of grace including the regular attendance of appointed church worship services, and private and family devotions with Bible reading and prayer. Further, we encourage participation in fellowship meetings, special meetings or conferences, and the showing of hospitality to the saints.
2. Members of CHRC shall devote themselves to the service of their fellow Christians and church members, sharing both material and spiritual blessings with one another.
3. Members of CHRC shall, in obedience to the Word of God and as a token of God's gift to us, give a tithe (10%) cheerfully and regularly to the ministry and labor of the Church.
4. Members of CHRC shall conduct themselves with godly attitude, speech and conduct toward their fellow church members, being slow to take offense and ready to resolve conflicts according to the instruction of Scripture (Cf. Matthew 5:23–24; 18:15–20).
5. Members of CHRC shall recognize, respect, and submit to the Session and Diaconate of CHRC in obedience to 2 Corinthians 1:24, Philippians 2:29, and Hebrews 13:17.

D. Privileges of Members

The business that may be transacted by the voting membership of the congregation at its duly called meetings shall include, but not be limited to the following:

1. Establishing, terminating, or altering the terms of contracts which involve long term (greater than one year) financial obligations pertaining to leases, rentals, mortgages, and employment within the congregation.
2. Approving unbudgeted expenditures over \$2,000, including the acquisition or disposition of any real property.
3. Reviewing the yearly Covenant Heritage Reformed Church Financial Report and offering non-binding advice in matters pertaining to the budget, purchase, or sale of church property.
4. Voting on salary and benefit proposals for church officers and employees.
5. Taking action to call men to serve as elders or deacons for the congregation in any of the following manners:
 - a. By nominating members of the congregation to serve as either elders or deacons,
 - b. By voting on the election of such officers upon the Session's approval of their qualifications,
 - c. By calling other qualified men from outside the congregation when necessary.
6. Approving and amending the Clerk's minutes of the congregational meeting.
7. Polling (via a non-binding vote) all members, all voting members, or some special portion of the membership (e.g., the youth, the men, or the women) in order to obtain input from them concerning a particular matter.
8. Voting on membership and withdrawal of membership in any formal association with other churches. Such shall require the prior approval of the Session and a three-fourths majority vote of the congregation.

E. Release or Transfer of Membership

1. Members shall be released from the rolls of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church only by order of the Session on the basis of death, transfer to another church, release to an unsound church with admonition, or through the corrective disciplinary action of excommunication.
2. If a member household or individual member of CHRC in good standing requests to be released to the care of another Christian church, the Session will normally grant the request, and release them with a blessing after determining the reasons for the transfer and having been given the opportunity of exhortation in the event that the other church does not hold to the same doctrinal standards of CHRC. If a member household or individual member joins another Christian church without prior consultation, the Session shall acknowledge the transfer of membership effective on the date of joining the new congregation, and shall provide a letter of admonition if it is deemed needful.
3. If the Session of CHRC determines that the requesting member or household is seeking to join an apostate or unsound church, or a non-Christian sect or cult, as formally decided by the Session, the Session will deny the request with an explanation of the reasons for the denial. If the member or household persists in joining, or joins without prior consultation, the Session will release them from membership in Covenant Heritage Reformed Church with a letter of admonition. This may include an admonition that they have separated themselves from fellowship in Christ's church and will no longer be recognized as professing Christians.
4. If a member household or individual member of CHRC requests to be released because of disciplinary proceedings against the individual or anyone in the household, the Session will deny the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved.
5. If a member household or individual member is moving from our geographical area, the Session will exhort them before they leave on their duty to find a new church home. Apart from extraordinary circumstances, the Session expects them to join with a Christian church in their new locality. If they have not joined themselves to a new church within one year of moving, the Session will release them from membership in Covenant Heritage Reformed Church with a letter of admonition. If the Session judges their inaction to be due to a low view of church membership, they will be regarded as an individual "home church" (albeit without proper oversight) and their release from CHRC will be considered the equivalent of a transfer to an unsound church. If the Session judges their inaction to be due to a lack of concern for living according to their profession of faith, their decision will be accepted as a denial of their prior profession of faith. As such, their release from CHRC will be noted as an act of excommunication from Christ's Church in accordance with Article VII.F.
6. In like manner, if a member household or individual member voluntarily withdraws from the communion of saints at CHRC as evidenced by their habitual absence from worship services over the course of a year, the Session will release them from membership at Covenant Heritage Reformed Church as an act of formal discipline. Each instance shall be decided on a case-by-case basis, and sporadic attendance need not be accepted as proof of desire to remain in communion. As in paragraph 5 above, their withdrawal from communion at CHRC will be accepted as a denial of their prior profession of faith, and their release from CHRC will be noted as an act of excommunication from Christ's Church in accordance with Article VII.F.

F. Determination of Electors

1. Those members of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church who vote in church elections and congregational meetings will be called electors.
2. Qualifications for electors: Electors of CHRC are those who are heads of member households. Unmarried members who are independent of their parents may be considered as a household for purposes of voting.

3. Authority of electors: Electors may vote in the elections of elders and deacons, vote in congregational meetings, and provide input to the elders and deacons at any time, but especially at stated heads of household meetings.
4. Qualified electors: The Session will qualify electors. Three weeks prior to any election to church office, the election will be announced and the ballot will be provided to the electors. Those who desire to vote but who do not receive a ballot may contact the Session. If qualified, they will be provided a ballot in time for the election.

Article IV: Selection of Church Officers

A. Definitions

1. The continuing offices of the church requiring ordination to the office are elder and deacon. Church officers shall be duly called, elected, ordained, and installed by the Session of CHRC from time to time as circumstances warrant. The congregation shall always, so far as it is possible, provide for itself a minimum of two elders. No minimum number of deacons is required.
2. Ordination is the authoritative admission of one called to an office in the Church, accompanied with examination, prayer and the laying on of hands. The Session shall ordain those men who have been nominated by a member of the congregation, examined by the Session, and recognized by the congregation to have been called and equipped by God to hold special positions in the church. As every ecclesiastical office is, according to the Scriptures, a special charge, no man shall be ordained unless it is to the definite performance of the work of his office.

B. Qualifications and Process

1. Elections will be held from time to time as circumstances warrant. A man may be called to an office in several ways. He may aspire to the office himself, an elder may approach him, or other church members may suggest his name to the Session. Once he becomes a candidate, the Session will examine him 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 Session of it. All candidates must meet the qualifications for the office set down in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; 1 Timothy 3:8–13). A man may not be placed on the ballot without the unanimous consent of the current Session.
2. If a candidate is denied approval by the Session, they shall provide him the following:
 - a. A list of deficiencies or areas of concern, stated in biblical terms.
 - b. A proposed course of action for remedying those deficiencies and concerns.
3. Once on the ballot, a candidate should receive the unanimous support of the voting congregation (Philippians 2:1–4). The requirement of unanimity may be set aside only through the unanimous consent of the Session after they have carefully considered the objections of any of the electors in light of Scripture. The Session will set aside such objections if it is clear that the objections are unscriptural or unwarranted. However, refusal to overturn these objections does not constitute the Session's agreement with the objections. If the objections are overturned, then one of the elders will meet with those who objected to discuss the Session's decision. Also, in the case of a non-unanimous vote, any candidate may at that time decide to forego ordination and installation, so as to give himself ample time to demonstrate to the congregation his abilities and qualifications for such an office. He may also decide to retract his candidacy. As a minimum, a three-fourths majority vote will be required for the successful election of an elder or deacon to office.

4. If the candidate receives the required support of the voting congregation (Philippians 2:1–4), the Session will ordain new officers through the laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 14:23; 6:6). They will also install all newly elected officers as representatives of the congregation.
5. Once ordained and installed, the officer will serve as long as he remains a member of the congregation at CHRC, unless he resigns or is removed.

C. Examination, Ordination, and Installation of Elders

1. Once he becomes a candidate, the nominee shall be examined by and must receive unanimous approval from the Session concerning each of the following:
 - a. His walk with Christ, especially his personal character and household management (based on the qualifications for the office set down in Scripture: 1 Timothy 3:1–7, and Titus 1:5–9).
 - b. His knowledge of Bible content, theology, the sacraments, church history, and the principles and rules of the government and discipline of the church.
 - c. His mental reservation, if any, about any portion of the church's Constitution or doctrinal standards.
2. Having been examined in the above areas and approved to preach, the nominee must preach before the congregation.
3. Once approved by the Session, the candidate is to be publicly declared to the congregation as a man qualified for the office during a formal worship service. Ample time, determined by the Session, is then given before the formal election meeting so that individual members can personally address any concerns with the candidate. Once on the ballot, approved candidates for the office of elder shall be voted on by the electors.
4. Once the candidate has been approved by the Session and has been elected by the congregation, a day of ordination shall be set by the Session, wherein they shall establish an appropriate order for that service. At that time, the Session will ordain new elders through the laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 14:23). The Session will install newly elected elders as undershepherds for the congregation of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church.
 - a. The day having arrived, and the Session being convened in the presence of the congregation, a sermon shall be preached after which the presiding elder shall state in a concise manner the warrant and nature of the office of elder, together with the character proper to be sustained and the duties to be fulfilled. Having done this, he shall propose to the candidate, in the presence of the church, the following questions, namely:
 - 1) **Do you acknowledge before God and man that the Holy Scriptures, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, are the inspired, inerrant Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?**
 - 2) **Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Ecumenical Creeds and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as setting forth the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?**
 - 3) **Do you further promise to observe the provisions of the Constitution of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church and faithfully to uphold its duly adopted worship, discipline, and government, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?**

- 4) **Do you accept the office of elder in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?**
 - 5) **Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?**
 - 6) **Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?**
- b. The elder elect having answered in the affirmative, the presiding elder shall address to the members of the church the following question:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as an elder, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?
 - c. The members of the church having answered this question in the affirmative, the candidate shall then be set apart, with prayer by the presiding elder or any other Session member and the laying on of the hands of the Session, to the office of elder. Prayer being ended, the members of the Session shall take the newly ordained officer by the hand, saying in words to this effect:

We give you the right hand of fellowship, to take part in this office with us.
 - d. The presiding elder shall then say:

I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, ordained and installed an elder in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, and according to the Constitution of this congregation; and that as such he is entitled to all encouragement, honor and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.
 - e. After which the presiding elder shall give to the newly installed elder and to the church an exhortation suited to the occasion.
5. In the case of a pastoral candidate, the electors will be asked to vote on whether or not a call to the pastorate should be extended to him. Unanimity is required in the same manner as for other elders. If approved, this call will be made provisionally and must be finalized by a second congregational vote after the candidate has been examined by the appropriate presbytery of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

D. Examination, Ordination, and Installation of Deacons

1. Once he becomes a candidate, the nominee shall be examined by and must receive unanimous approval from the Session concerning each of the following:
 - a. His walk with Christ, his personal character and household management (based on the qualifications for the office set down in Scripture: Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Timothy 3:8–13).
 - b. His mental reservation, if any, about any portion of the church's Constitution or doctrinal standards.
2. At the same time, the deacons (or elders acting in the capacity of deacons) will include the candidate in their work in order to prove his fitness for the office (1 Timothy 3:10). When, in the unanimous judgment of the deacons, the candidate has shown his fitness for the office, the deacons will make a recommendation to the Session to place his name on the ballot.

3. Once approved by the Session, with the recommendation of the deacons, the candidate is to be publicly declared to the congregation as a man qualified for the office during a formal worship service. Ample time, determined by the Session, is then given before the formal election meeting so that individual members can personally address any concerns with the candidate. Once on the ballot, approved candidates for the office of deacon shall be voted on by the electors.
4. Once the candidate has been approved by the Session and has been elected by the congregation, a day of ordination shall be set by the Session, wherein they shall establish an appropriate order for that service. At that time, the Session will ordain new deacons through the laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 6:6). The Session will install newly elected deacons as representatives for the congregation of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church.
5. The form of ordination and installation for deacons shall be the same as that for elders (Article IV.C.4.), substituting “deacon” for “elder” as appropriate.

E. Trainees for the Gospel Ministry

Men who show promise and interest in the work of the ministry shall present themselves to the Session for examination and consideration of being placed under the care and training of the Session. Upon receiving the Session's approval, the trainee shall be presented to the congregation and recognized as one who has placed himself under the guidance and training of the Session.

Article V. Duties and Responsibilities of Church Officers

A. Elders

1. Under Christ, the highest authority in the local church is the Session, which is comprised of elders who are equal in rank and authority. Each elder shall be a member of the local congregation. Elders will serve and meet their responsibilities willingly without domineering. The powers and duties of an elder shall, in general, be those entailed in pursuing or securing the purpose and objectives of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church (see ARTICLE I). The Session shall oversee all the affairs of the church. Their duties and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - a. Ruling and shepherding the congregation (1 Peter 5:1–2),
 - b. Equipping and promoting the spiritual growth of church members (Ephesians 4:11–12),
 - c. Teaching/preaching (1 Timothy 5:17),
 - d. Prayer/fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1–3),
 - e. Administering baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:19–20, 1 Corinthians 11:23–26),
 - f. Prayer for the healing of and visiting the sick (James 5:14–15),
 - g. Exercising moral discipline over members, by sitting in judgment of charges of offense, obtaining evidence, and applying church discipline (1 Corinthians 5:1–5),
 - h. Maintaining the government of the congregation,
 - i. Adding and removing names from the membership rolls of the church,
 - j. Overseeing all matters concerning the conduct of public worship,
 - k. Overseeing the work of the deacons and all other organizations within the church (including specialized ministries of the congregation),

- l. Arranging and supervising evangelistic and educational projects,
 - m. Hiring and dismissing church staff, defining the responsibilities of church staff, and delegating responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries,
 - n. Approving the annual budget, and
 - o. Commissioning or licensing ministerial students, and overseeing the course of their training for the eldership. Under the guidance and oversight of the Session, such commissioned individuals will have the opportunity to perform all the various ministerial functions of elders, participation in the rule of the church being the only exception.
2. The Session's duties and abilities also include, but are not limited to:
- a. A majority of elders may spend up to \$2,000.00 per month on unbudgeted items without congregational approval, provided sufficient funds are available in the General Reserve line item. This total amount includes the authorization to spend beyond budgeted amounts, provided excess receipts are already available to cover the cumulative additional expenses for the budget year.
 - b. By resolution, the Session may authorize other officers or members to execute and to deliver contracts for and in the name of the congregation. Any contracts so executed shall be deemed conclusive in favor of any purchaser, seller, or encumbrancer dealing with said other authorized agents in good faith and for value.
 - c. The Session may appoint, reappoint, remove and replace various chairmen within the congregation who will assist the Session in carrying out specific aspects of church functions. All such chairmen shall operate in submission to the oversight and final authority of the Session and, in relevant cases, to the direction of the deacons.
 - d. The Session may establish or remove specialized ministries within the congregation, as well as boards to manage such operations, that are dedicated to a specific service within the church under the authority of the Session.
 - e. The actions and policies of the Session shall be available to the congregation. A summary of the previous year's events and involvement of individual elders shall be presented to the congregation in the form of a "Session Report" given at the yearly congregational meeting.
3. The Session will normally conduct all of its business at stated meetings (regularly scheduled), and at called meetings (called for a particular purpose). The Session will determine the frequency of the meetings in order to allow for appropriate time to manage all of its business. In general, Session meetings will be conducted in the following manner:
- a. The Session will appoint one elder as Moderator to run the meeting.
 - b. The Session will appoint one elder as Clerk to record the minutes and to maintain the records.
 - c. The Session will determine the duration of the terms for the Moderator and the Clerk.
 - d. Session meetings shall be conducted following the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, Newly Revised.
 - e. In all meetings of the Session, each elder has one vote.
 - f. The quorum for meetings of the Session shall be at least 51% of the active elders. A minimum of two elders is required for a quorum. If Covenant Heritage Reformed Church ever finds itself served by fewer than two elders, the remaining elder, or the diaconate if there are no elders, shall seek a plurality of elders to shepherd the congregation without delay (Matthew 9:36; Acts 14:23).

4. Urgent matters (i.e., matters which cannot reasonably be delayed until the next Session meeting, either stated or called) may be acted on by the Moderator after consulting with the rest of the Session in accordance with the following guidelines:
 - a. At a minimum, a majority of the active elders at CHRC (including the Moderator) shall be consulted, and every effort shall be made to consult all the active elders.
 - b. All decisions made in this fashion require the approval of a majority of the active elders, not just a majority of the elders consulted.
 - c. All decisions made in this fashion will be reported at the next Session meeting, along with the names of those elders voting in favor of the decision.
5. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church shall compensate those elders who labor primarily in the ministry of the Word (1 Timothy 5:17–18), and may compensate other elders as the Session deems appropriate.

B. Deacons

1. The responsibilities of the deacons shall be those duties delegated to them by the Session. Diaconal duties include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Showing compassion and mercy toward saints and strangers who are in need or distress, including widows and orphans (Acts 6:2–4),
 - b. Collecting and disbursing funds for the relief of the needy from a general Benevolence Fund,
 - c. Visiting, praying with, and/or meeting the physical needs of the sick and sorrowing,
 - d. Organizing and encouraging church members to engage in such services to others,
 - e. Caring for the property, grounds, and buildings owned or used by the congregation,
 - f. Preparing and administering the annual budget, and
 - g. Holding regular meetings or, at times, special meetings called for a particular urgent situation.
2. Individual deacons will be given responsibility for certain duties with due regard to their gifts and desires. There is no distinction of rank among the deacons.
3. Special donations to the Benevolence Fund will be collected along with the normal tithes and offerings during the worship service as desired and as necessary.
4. Deacons shall review salaries and benefits of church officers and employees (if any) annually and make recommendations to the congregation at the annual congregational meeting for any needed adjustments.
5. 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 each monthly Session meeting. If there is ever fewer than two deacons serving in the congregation, the duties of the diaconate will be administered by the Session in conjunction with the remaining deacon, if any.

6. Benevolence Fund

- a. In the benevolent functions of the church, the deacons are responsible to maintain the biblical standard of money, charity, work, and related issues (Galatians 6:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:4–16; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 5:3–4, 8; Isaiah 10:1–4).
- b. The Benevolence Fund is available to members and regular attendees of CHRC to meet pressing needs. When a need is made known through the Session, deacons, or members of the church, the deacons will examine the scope and urgency of the need and present it to the Session. Upon approval by the Session, the family or individual will be placed on the Benevolence Fund until the need is met or they are removed for other reasons.
- c. Upon being placed on the list for the Benevolence Fund, the head of the household will be asked to submit an acceptable household budget to the deacons within thirty days. A deacon or elder will be assigned to review the family budget and give counsel and financial advice as necessary.
- d. The head of the household is required to demonstrate due diligence that he is seeking to provide for his family. This requirement does not apply to any woman, regardless of her status as the head of her household.
- e. The household will be discouraged from receiving public assistance in the form of food stamps or direct welfare payments, not including medical reimbursements or assistance.
- f. In case of one-time needs exceeding \$1000, the deacons will seek Session approval for the expenditure at the next stated Session meeting. If the need cannot be met from the Benevolence Fund, the deacons may seek Session approval to move funds from general savings to meet the need. A household budget will not be required for one-time needs paid in full from the Benevolence Fund. However, a budget will be requested by the deacons if the family stays on the list for the Benevolence Fund after that particular need is met.
- g. Families supported by the Benevolence Fund will be visited by a deacon at least once a month to ensure their financial needs are being met. Budget counseling will be provided by the deacons when necessary. If there are spiritual matters which need attention, the deacons will notify the Session. The deacons will report regularly to the Session on the status of families remaining on the list for the Benevolence Fund more than three months.
- h. Indigent giving will be decided by the deacons on a case-by-case basis. As a general rule the deacons will not disburse money to indigents, but will purchase items necessary to meet basic needs in such areas as food, clothing, shelter, and travel.

7. Christian Education Fund

- a. The Christian Education Fund is a special category of the Benevolence Fund. Monies from the fund will be available to help qualified families with expenses associated with providing a biblical education for their dependent children, whether for homeschooling, tutorial services, or a private Christian school. The fund will be supplied as an item in the annual budget and through designated gifts.
- b. In ordinary situations, the family concerned will be asked to show its commitment to Christian education through providing as much for their children's' education as their budget will allow. In extraordinary situations, the entire cost may be borne by the fund.
- c. Whenever possible, payments will be made directly to the school, tutorial service, textbook supplier, etc.
- d. Recipients of the Christian Education Fund must qualify fully for the Benevolence Fund.

- e. In addition to Benevolence Fund criteria, the following standards also apply. The Session must have reason to believe that, due to personal or financial constraints, the children are likely to receive non-Christian or sub-standard Christian education. The family will receive consistent pastoral counseling for the duration of support from the fund, consistent with the circumstances. The deacons will verify that the fund is not being used to pay tuition in such a way as to receive a tax write-off.
- f. Recipients must be re-approved in July for the following school year. After a family has received support for one school year, the deacons will assign a member to review the family's household budget and help them set up a plan to assume the entire cost of their children's education.

C. Terms of Office

1. Upon election, ordination and installation, the officers of the congregation shall normally serve in office as long as they remain members of the congregation at CHRC.
2. If an elder or deacon desires time off from active service (i.e., sabbatical, leave of absence, or resignation), he will present a letter expressing this desire and explaining his reasons to the Session. The Session will notify the congregation upon receipt of the letter, and will discuss the reasons for the request with the officer. If the desire of the officer concerned is unchanged and a majority of the Session concurs, the Session will approve the request and will inform the congregation. The Session will also determine the duration of any sabbatical and leave of absence, taking into consideration the specific situation.
 - a. A sabbatical is meant to be a short term rest from active service, often for personal development, and entails: (1) inactive session membership status, (2) relinquishing any official positions held in the church (i.e., Moderator, Clerk, Treasurer, etc.), (3) retaining one's ordination, and (4) no re-installation upon return to active status.
 - b. A leave of absence is usually meant to address difficult or challenging life circumstances, and entails: (1) inactive session membership status, (2) relinquishing any official positions held in the church (i.e., Moderator, Clerk, Treasurer, etc.), (3) retaining one's ordination but surrendering voting privileges in all officers' meetings (with the exception of voting on any issue where at least half of the active elders deem it wise to include all officers in the decision), (4) inquiry upon return as to whether the needs of the leave have been met, and (5) no re-installation upon return to active status.
 - c. Resignation entails: (1) removal from session membership, and (2) retaining one's ordination unless one or more conditions of Article V.C.3 apply. Officers who have resigned from active service may be selected to serve again by the normal nomination and election process, including ordination and/or installation as required
3. Officers of the congregation shall surrender their ordination to office under any of the following conditions:
 - a. Resignation/removal from office due to lack of moral or doctrinal fitness as determined according to Article VI.
 - b. Resignation of an office due to admitted moral or doctrinal turpitude. In such a case, the Session must exercise biblical discipline prior to, or in conjunction with, any consideration of the letter of resignation.
 - c. Excommunication from membership in the congregation by judicial action.

D. Treasurer

1. The treasurer is a non-ordained office of the church. As an office of the church, the position of treasurer shall be filled by males only. He shall be responsible to the Session and diaconate in all financial matters pertaining to the church. The duties and responsibilities of the treasurer shall include:
 - a. Maintaining custody of, and being responsible for, all church funds and securities, and depositing all such funds in the name of the congregation in such banks, trust companies, or other depositories as shall be selected by the Session,
 - b. Receiving and, when needed, giving receipt for contributions of value (or monies due and payable), to the congregation,
 - c. Disbursing the funds of the congregation as directed by the Session and diaconate, taking proper vouchers for such disbursements,
 - d. Keeping and maintaining adequate and correct records of the congregation's business transactions, including accounts of its assets, liabilities, receipts, and disbursements, and
 - e. Preparing and presenting to the Session and diaconate a monthly financial report, covering revenues, expenditures and balances on hand for the previous month.
2. The fiscal year for the congregation shall begin the first day of the calendar year and end on the last day of the calendar year.

Article VI: Removal of Church Officers

1. If a member of the congregation believes an elder or deacon to be morally or doctrinally unfit for office, the scriptural requirement for him is clear: he is to approach that elder individually first (Matthew 18:15), and then with one or two others (Matthew 18:16). If the problem remains, then the individual, with the two or three witnesses, should come to the other elders and present the charges (1 Timothy 5:19).
2. If a majority of the Session (excluding the accused, in such a case) decides that the question merits an investigation and/or trial, then they will inform the men of the church of the nature of the charges, announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or trial, and encourage the men to attend.
3. If the charges are sustained by a three-fourths majority of the Session (not including the elder that is under accusation), then the accused elder or deacon, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction, may be rebuked at a congregational meeting (1 Timothy 5:20) or entirely removed from the office of elder or deacon (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), or both.
4. While Covenant Heritage Reformed Church encourages her pastor(s) toward a long-term view of the ministry, in the providence of God, changes in a pastor's call to a particular church arise for both righteous and sinful reasons. In cases involving moral failures requiring disciplinary proceedings, the disciplinary process for the removal of a pastor is the same as for other elders. For cases that do not involve moral failures or disciplinary proceedings (e.g., Acts 15:33–41, Romans 15:22–33, 1 Corinthians 16:5–12), the procedure for terminating the call of a pastor, thereby dismissing him from service at CHRC, is as follows:
 - a. If a pastor desires to terminate his call and dissolve the pastoral relationship with the congregation, he shall duly inform the Session of his desire. A congregational meeting shall be called for the purpose of dissolving the pastoral relationship established by the initial call, and the Session will announce the formation of a pulpit committee.

- b. In the case of an involuntary termination of his call, a pastor may be dismissed from service at CHRC by a three-fourths majority vote of the Session (excluding said pastor).

Article VII: Discipline

A. Necessity and Types of Discipline

1. One of the marks of a true church of Jesus Christ is that it maintains discipline. The purpose of church discipline is, through biblical means, to prevent, restrain, or even to remove any evil that may threaten the church, to promote and to encourage that which is good and glorifying to God, and to bring an offender to repentance and reconciliation with Christ and the church. Church discipline, in all its forms (preventative, formative, corrective, and final excommunication), is the line of demarcation between the church and the world; without it, we cannot distinguish between the two.
2. Any member who is under corrective discipline or under the procedure of final discipline shall not be released from the membership of the congregation until such proceedings are completed.
3. The three types of discipline are: preventative, formative, and corrective.

B. Subjects and Nature of Discipline

1. Any professing Christian is subject to formative and informal corrective discipline, whether or not they worship regularly at Covenant Heritage Reformed Church.
2. Communicant Members: Anyone who meets the criteria of communicant membership according to Article III of the CHRC Constitution is subject to formal corrective discipline and excommunication by the church. Communicant members who are children are also subject to formal corrective discipline and excommunication by the church, although the Session will seek to work with the parents, taking into account the age and circumstances of the child.
3. Non-communicant members are subject to formal corrective discipline.
4. Un-baptized members of member households are subject to informal corrective discipline only.
5. Professing Christians who worship at CHRC regularly, but who are not members, are subject to formal corrective discipline, but not excommunication.
6. Professing Christians under discipline by other churches: If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently worships with our congregation, then the Session will decide whether to honor the discipline of the other church after due consultation with the person concerned and after all appropriate information is obtained from the disciplining church.

C. Preventative Discipline

This aspect of church discipline guards the entrance into the church and seeks to prevent unbelievers from becoming a part of the local assembly (Act 9:26–27). In this regard:

1. The church is established for the feeding and care of believers and their households.
2. The Session will examine and determine those who are eligible for baptism and church membership.
3. The Session will invite those who have been baptized to participate in the Lord's Supper, while warning all against unworthy participation in the sacrament.

D. Formative Discipline

1. Once a person has become a member of the church of Jesus Christ, he immediately comes under the primary work of the church, which is formative discipline. This aspect of church discipline is the routine work of the local church (Ephesians 4:11–16), and is the means whereby church members are instructed and trained in the Christian faith, with the goal of presenting every person mature in Christ (Colossians 1:28–29). It is to be accomplished by public and private means, and formal and informal methods, through the application of the Word of God (the primary means of formative discipline) in private counsel, instruction, rebuke and admonition (Matthew 18:15), and the public ministry of the Word.
2. Under this formative discipline of the local church, disciples are:
 - a. Given more of the Word of God by which they are built up in the faith (Acts 20:28, Colossians 2:7),
 - b. Sanctified and cleansed by the washing of water with the Word (Ephesians 5:25–27),
 - c. Helped to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior (2 Peter 3:18),
 - d. Rebuked, reprovved and called back to the path of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:1–2),
 - e. Stimulated to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24),
 - f. Taught to observe the commands of God (Matthew 28:19–20),
 - g. Equipped for the work of service (Ephesians 4:12),
 - h. Equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17), and
 - i. Helped to become workmen who need not be ashamed because they can rightly divide the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).
3. Through this formative discipline, a person is taught self-discipline, self-control, and self-correction. He is also taught to overlook the minor failings of others in love (1 Peter 4:8).

E. Corrective Discipline

1. A third aspect of church discipline is corrective discipline whereby the church applies biblical admonition to wayward members, seeking to restore them to a place of conformity to Christ's rule (Galatians 6:1) by means of informal and formal action.
2. Informal corrective discipline is applied by an individual or multiple members of the church without the formal action of the Session or the church as a body. This informal counsel, admonishment, reproof, rebuke, etc. (2 Timothy 4:1–2) serves to encourage one another to faithfulness and to warn others in love to guard their hearts and minds against specific temptations and sins (Matthew 18:15).
3. If the church has been faithful in maintaining preventative and formative discipline, then the need for formal corrective discipline (e.g., public rebuke or censure, cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15) will be rare. However, in those situations where informal discipline does not result in satisfactory correction, then those who are aware of the need for discipline are expected to call the matter to the attention of the Session. The procedure for corrective discipline is to be followed in a way that is appropriate to the nature of the offense, and the directions of Matthew 18:15–16 shall normally be followed in their proper order before formal charges are filed with or by the Session (Matthew 18:17–18). However, in the case of open and scandalous sin, there is no requirement to attempt private resolution of the matter, and it should be brought to the Session without delay. In such extraordinary situations, the

Session has the authority to take immediate disciplinary action if the honor of Christ or the purity of the church is directly threatened by a failure to act.

4. Formal church discipline is applied through the formal action and unanimous judgment of the Session. Formal discipline will be pursued only after scriptural prerequisites have been satisfied and the Session has made sufficient inquiry. Formal discipline generally entails the following actions under the authority and oversight of the Session: Formal Private Admonishment, Formal Public Admonishment, and Formal Trial.

F. Formal Disciplinary Procedures

1. Formal Pre-trial Procedures

- a. When the Session determines that formal discipline is necessary, it will initiate the biblical means to admonish the brother or sister in a fair, just, solemn and timely manner.
- b. The Session shall establish the specific procedures for each admonishment, singly or in combination, on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, these procedures should include:
 - 1) Formal Private Admonishment: When a brother or sister is in sin and remains unrepentant, rejecting informal admonition, one or two members of the church, appointed by the Session, will formally admonish them in private, pleading earnestly for their repentance and solemnly warning them of the dire spiritual consequences and judgment that may follow if they fail to repent (Matthew 18:16). The Session will inform them that this admonishment is the first step in formal church discipline. Failure to heed this private admonishment and to repent will lead to further discipline that may conclude in trial and excommunication from Christ's church.
 - 2) Formal Public Admonishment: In some cases, considering the gravity and scandalous nature of the sin, the Session may decide to admonish and warn the brother or sister before the Session so that they may be ashamed and repent (2 Thessalonians 3:14–15). When the Session decides to admonish a brother or sister in this manner, the Session will inform them that this admonishment is the first (or second) step in formal church discipline. Failure to heed this public admonishment and to repent will lead to further discipline that may conclude in trial and excommunication from Christ's church.

2. Formal Trial Procedures

- a. When all other informal and formal measures and admonishments have failed to bring about the desired repentance, or in extraordinary situations where the honor of Christ or the purity of the church demand immediate action, the Session must proceed to formally charge the brother or sister of specific, willful, and unrepentant violations of God's Law and try them accordingly in a fair, just, solemn and timely manner. The judgments which may be brought against a brother or sister convicted as a result of formal corrective discipline are suspension (which is exclusion from the Supper and from positions of responsibility or leadership) and excommunication. Excommunication shall only be considered if the accused exhibits a contumacious character in the face of formal discipline.
- b. When the Session determines that a trial is necessary, it will endeavor to use all biblical means to conduct a fair, just, solemn and timely trial.
- c. The Session shall establish the specific procedures for each trial on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include:
 - 1) Informing the accused of the detailed charges against them in writing, including the time, place, and date of the trial, and giving them ample time for the preparation of a defense. All

formal charges shall be stated in terms of God's law (the Bible) and shall be supported by citing which portions of God's law have been violated.

- 2) Opening the trial with prayer and a solemn charge from the Word of God on the responsibilities of those present;
- 3) Presenting the evidence against the accused and granting the accused time to make a reasonable defense at the trial, to reply and answer all charges, and to cross examine all witnesses called to testify;
- 4) Taking a separate vote by the Session on each of the charges, if there are more than one, at a subsequent meeting of the Session. This shall be done only after all the evidence has been presented, all relevant considerations have been fairly addressed, and the Session has had time to deliberate and prayerfully consider the matter;
- 5) Declaring publicly the judgment and actions of the Session regarding the accused on an appointed Lord's day, following an explanation and exhortation appropriate for the occasion, and providing the accused with a written copy of the judgment of the Session;
- 6) Making an official file containing all the records pertaining to the excommunication, including pertinent correspondence, transcripts, and minutes. If he requests it, the convicted member will be given one copy of this file at the expense of the church.
- 7) Formal trial decisions may be appealed by making a written request to the Session for a court of appeals. This appellate court shall be composed of a minimum of three men chosen by the Session from a "pool list" maintained by the Session. These men must be willing and available members from CHRC or other like-minded Reformed churches.
- 8) Any further appeal will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the denomination (e.g., Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches).

3. Formal Trial Outcomes

- a. Not Guilty: While all attempts will be made to protect the dignity of the defendant, at the discretion of the Session, when an innocent verdict is reached and there is sufficient public knowledge, the accused party's name will be cleared. If such a verdict suggests deceitfulness on the part of any of the witnesses who testified against the accused, such witness or witnesses will become the subject of an immediate judicial investigation according to the rules set forth in this Article (Deuteronomy 19:15–21).
- b. Guilty—Definite or Indefinite Suspension: Based on the outcome of the trial the member may be directed to abstain from the sacraments, based on 1 Corinthians 11:27ff, until repentance from the adjudged sin is deemed genuine so as not to add judgment by partaking of the sacraments. Furthermore, the member shall be excluded from positions of responsibility or leadership.
- c. Guilty—Excommunication: A final aspect of church discipline, which is the church's responsibility to perform, is the removal of a member by judicial action. Final church discipline has as its goal the elimination of the unrepentant person from the church (1 Corinthians 5:9–13), with the hope of restoring the spiritual life of the one who has fallen into habitual sin (1 Corinthians 5:5). The church has no choice but to obey Christ in these matters (Matthew 18:17). In the exceptional cases where this discipline becomes necessary, a church member who persistently refuses to yield to the formative and corrective discipline of the church is declared, by judicial action of the Session, to be excommunicated, which means he is no longer a member of this church and is considered to be an unbeliever. The Session will encourage the congregation to pray that God would grant repentance to the individual under judgment. In addition:
 - 1) If the circumstances warrant, there is no longer a scriptural prohibition of a Christian taking the individual under discipline to court before a civil magistrate.

- 2) If the one under discipline seeks to find a church that will accept him, then the Session of CHRC will contact that church and supply them with all the records of the disciplinary action. If the other church refuses to acknowledge the discipline, then CHRC will proceed on the assumption that the other church is in disobedience to Scripture and will not cultivate ties of fellowship with that church.
- 3) The following Form for Excommunication shall be used to inform the congregation of the trial verdict:

Church discipline must always be conducted under the headship and the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. This being the case, we acknowledge that Christ has required His church to conduct such church discipline in order to preserve and protect moral and doctrinal purity. The purpose of our church discipline is to glorify God through obedience, to maintain the purity of Christ's church, and to reclaim the offender if possible.

After repeated efforts to exhort and instruct [] with regard to [his/her] Christian duty to [], the Session of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church has determined, after a judicial trial on [date] in accordance with the pattern set forth in Scripture and the procedures of our church constitution, that [] is guilty of the charge(s) brought against [him/her] at that trial. The charge(s) was/were:

It is therefore with grief that the Elders of CHRC unanimously pronounce that [] is hereby expelled from Christ's church. We declare this day, by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, that [] is excommunicated in accordance with the requirements of Scripture, and is put outside the Church and is excluded from the fellowship of Christ and the spiritual blessings and benefits which God promises to and bestows upon His Church. [He/she] is delivered to the domain of Satan, and is hereafter to be accounted by you as a Gentile and an outcast. We exhort you not to fellowship with [him/her] as a [brother/sister] in Christ that [he/she] may be ashamed.

It is our prayer that God will use this action we have taken today to glorify His name, and if He is willing, to restore [] to fellowship with us.

G. Restoration

1. The church must be faithful to forgive and to receive back anyone who repents (Matthew 18:21–22), and to grant full restoration in the church upon such repentance (2 Corinthians 2:6–8).
2. Formal admonishment, indefinite suspension, or excommunicative censure shall be ended when, in the opinion of a three-fourths majority of the Session, the one under discipline has been restored through repentance and rededication, or conversion. A confession by the individual under formal discipline will be read to the congregation on the Lord's Day or delivered by the individual as deemed appropriate by the Session, and the Session shall announce the end of the disciplinary action to the church.

Article VIII. The Calling and Conduct of Congregational Meetings

All meetings shall be conducted following the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*, Newly Revised, a copy of which is available for reference upon request.

A. Scheduling and Notice of Meetings

Congregational meetings shall be scheduled at the discretion of the Session. Public notice of any such meeting shall be made at worship services on the two Lord's Days preceding the meeting or by letter postmarked ten days in advance of the meeting.

B. Regular and Special Meetings

1. A regular meeting of the congregation shall be held at least once every calendar year (the exact date to be set by the Session) at which any relevant and legitimate business of the members may be transacted. This meeting shall include at least a yearly Deacon's Report and Session Report given by the officers of the church. These two reports shall be comprehensive and include the activities of the officers during the previous year. The Deacon's Report shall include the yearly Covenant Heritage Reformed Church Financial Report itemizing moneys spent during the past year. A second meeting will be held each year in December for the purpose of presenting the budget for the following year. The congregation is to vote on the terms of call for the pastor(s) at this meeting.
2. The Session shall call special congregational meetings when they deem it best to do so or upon written request by one-fourth of the voting members. At specially called meetings, no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice of the meeting.

C. Quorum and Voting in Meetings

1. A quorum shall consist of greater than 50% of all eligible voting members.
2. Legitimate motions made at congregational meetings shall pass by a simple majority of voting members, unless otherwise stipulated in this Constitution.
3. Eligible voters who are present but abstain from voting shall not be counted for the purposes of determining voting percentages.
4. The election of elders and deacons shall always be by signed ballot.
5. Voting by proxy on the election of church officers shall be permitted by special approval of the Session based on the determination of legitimate need (e.g., illness, job, etc.).
 - a. An elector who expects not to be able to attend a meeting at which he will have voting rights may be represented and cast his vote by his spouse (who must be a member in good standing at CHRC) with no proxy needed, or by giving another elector (who must himself have voting rights at the meeting) his proxy. Proxies shall be in writing, signed by the elector giving the proxy, and shall specify:
 - 1) The name of the elector being represented by proxy.
 - 2) The name of the elector being given representative capacity.
 - 3) The date of the meeting at which the proxy is to be used.
 - b. Proxies shall be valid only for the one meeting specified therein. If the elector who gave a proxy attends the meeting specified in his proxy, the proxy shall be void, and the elector shall cast his own vote. No elector shall represent more than five other electors by proxy at any meeting of electors.

D. Moderator and Clerk

1. One of the elders shall serve as the Moderator in congregational meetings. The Moderator has authority to keep order and to direct the operations of the meetings of the congregation. The Moderator of a congregational meeting may vote in the decisions of that body.
2. The Session shall appoint a Clerk to serve in all congregational meetings that occur during his term. The Clerk shall be a male communicant member. If the appointed Clerk is absent or unavailable, the Session shall appoint another person to serve in that capacity temporarily.
3. The Clerk shall keep a correct record of all business transacted at congregational meetings. Toward that end, the minutes of a meeting shall be approved by the congregation prior to the close of the same meeting. The Clerk shall submit such minutes to be preserved with the records of the Session.

Article IX: Committees

1. The Session shall appoint standing committees and designate a chairperson for each standing committee, and except when otherwise specifically provided in these bylaws, shall determine the membership of each standing committee.
2. The Session, in its discretion, may create special committees to provide the Session with advice and information regarding matters submitted to the committee by the Session for consideration. The committee shall have no authority to take action on behalf of the Session. The members of the committee shall be chosen by a majority vote of the Session and shall serve solely at the pleasure of the Session. The special committee shall be subject to the control and direction of the Session at all times.

Article X. The Sacraments

A. Meaning and Observance

1. The Lord Jesus Christ has given His church two sacraments, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper, which replace the signs of circumcision and the Old Testament sacrificial feasts, most notably the Passover (Matthew 28:19; Romans 4:11; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 11:23–26; Colossians 2:11–12). These sacraments signify and seal to those within the covenant of grace the benefits of Christ's mediation, strengthen and increase their faith, and place a visible difference between those that belong to the church and the rest of the world. The sign of baptism is initiatory and therefore is to be administered only once. The Supper of the Lord is to be observed regularly until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. The baptized children of communicant members are accepted as members of the covenant community and are therefore admitted as communing members of the church. They are to be taught to love God, and to obey and serve the Lord Jesus Christ. All children of church members should be earnestly reminded that it is their duty and privilege to personally repent of their sins, to receive Christ as their Savior, to study the Scriptures and Reformed Confessions to show themselves approved, to increasingly demonstrate self-control and Christian maturity, and to confess the Lord Jesus Christ before men.

B. Baptism

1. Water baptism, as a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, solemnly admits the baptized into the community of the Church. Baptism initially marks out Christ's disciples (Matthew 28:18–20) and, therefore, those who are baptized must live in accordance with the testimony of this baptism. In this, we recognize the objectivity of the covenant sign and membership in the covenant community of the Church. Baptized persons have a non-negotiable covenantal obligation to live in accordance with their baptism.
2. The requirement to receive Christian baptism as the sign of admission into the Church is not intended to deny the spiritual union with Christ that we believe is established for new believers when they profess faith in Christ, and that we pray in faith is established for covenant children even from the womb. This is why we are able to console parents whose child is taken in infancy or even before birth, why we are able to rest in the profession of those who die prior to being baptized, and why we deny the absolute necessity of baptism for salvation. (Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 28, Paragraph 5)
3. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church believes in the practice of infant baptism (also known as paedobaptism). Infants of believers are to be baptized (Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 7:14). All heads of households will be encouraged by the Session to pursue the baptism of their infants.
4. Water baptism is required of those seeking membership. When an unbeliever professes faith in Christ and desires to become a member of CHRC, he shall, ordinarily, make a public profession of faith in the presence of the congregation and thereafter be baptized. When an unbaptized believer moves to

our church, he will be instructed on his responsibility to obey Christ by receiving baptism at the first opportunity. He will not be admitted into membership until he is baptized. When a baptized person requests to join CHRC, the Session will evaluate his baptism according to the following criteria:

- a. The baptism must be a Trinitarian baptism which was performed in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 - b. The validity of a baptism does not necessarily depend upon the integrity of the person conducting the baptism or upon the doctrinal and moral integrity of the administering church. Nevertheless, the degree of orthodoxy of the baptizing church may be so low as to require our Session to consider that church to be no Christian church at all. Baptisms administered by such a church will not be accepted as Christian baptisms.
 - c. Given the complexity of such issues, the Session will deal with each evaluation on a case-by-case basis.
5. The baptism of the head of household should be accompanied by the baptism of the whole household (Acts 16:15, 33), unless an individual member of the household has previously been lawfully baptized or denies the faith through willful rebellion.
 6. In accordance with the desires of those families who practice believer's baptism, the Session, whose office it is to judge, will carefully examine the qualifications of those covenant members who apply for baptism and admission to the Lord's Supper by profession of faith. Upon their profession of faith, these persons shall be admitted into communing membership by baptism, using the form and questions found in Article III.B.1.
 7. Concerning the mode of baptism, dipping of the person into the water is not necessary, but baptism is acceptably administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person. Baptism, as a sign of the covenant of grace, ought to reflect the reality of which it is a sign. Therefore, baptism is properly administered by the water coming upon the person rather than the person coming into the water. This accords well with the reality of the Gospel, salvation by grace, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Spirit baptism. It is recognized that churches have historically varied in practice, and it is admitted that the form of baptism—whether by immersion, sprinkling, or pouring—is of less importance than the substance of this covenant sign; therefore, we will not make this a point of contention but shall understand that it is, at times, a matter of conscience for the individual believer (or the head of the household) in agreement with the Session.
 8. When presented by one or more believing parents or some other responsible person, infants and children shall be baptized in the presence of the congregation in the following manner:
 - a. Before baptism, the minister is to use some words of instruction, touching the institution, nature, use, and ends of this sacrament, showing:
 - 1) That it is instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ;
 - 2) That it is a seal of the Covenant of Grace, of our ingrafting into Christ, and of our union with Him, of remission of sins, regeneration, adoption, and life eternal;
 - 3) That the water, in baptism, represents and signifies both the blood of Christ, which takes away all guilt of sin, original and actual; and the sanctifying virtue of the Spirit of Christ against the dominion of sin, and the corruption of our sinful nature;
 - 4) That baptizing, or sprinkling and washing with water, signifies the cleansing from sin by the blood and for the merit of Christ, together with the mortification of sin, and rising from sin to newness of life, by virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ;
 - 5) That the promise is made to believers and their children; and that the children of believers have an interest in the covenant, and right to the seal of it, under the Gospel, no less than the

- children of Abraham in the time of the Old Testament; the Covenant of Grace, for substance, being the same; and the grace of God, and the consolation of believers, more plentiful than before;
- 6) That the Son of God admitted little children into His presence, embracing and blessing them, saying, "For of such is the kingdom of God";
 - 7) That children by baptism, are solemnly received into the bosom of the Church, distinguished from the world, and them that are without, and united with believers; and that all who are baptized in the name of Christ, do renounce, and by their baptism are bound to fight against the devil, the world, and the flesh;
 - 8) That they are federally holy before baptism, and therefore are they baptized;
 - 9) That the inward grace and virtue of baptism is not tied to that very moment of time wherein it is administered; and that the fruit and power thereof reaches to the whole course of our life; and that outward baptism is not so necessary, that through the want thereof, the infant is in danger of damnation;
 - 10) By virtue of being children of believing parents they are, because of God's covenant ordinance, made members of the Church, but this is not sufficient to make them continue as members of the Church. According to their ability, they are subject to the obligations of the covenant: to publicly profess their faith, repent and obey the Gospel, or to become covenant breakers.
- b. The minister is also to exhort the parents to the careful performance of their duty, requiring:
- 1) That they teach the child to read the Word of God;
 - 2) that they instruct him in the principles of our holy religion, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,
 - 3) that they pray with and for him;
 - 4) that they set an example of piety and godliness before him; and endeavor, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring up their child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.
- c. The minister shall then propose the following questions:
- 1) **Do you acknowledge your child's need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ, and the renewing grace of the Holy Spirit?**
 - 2) **Do you claim God's covenant promises in (his/her) behalf, and do you look in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ for (his/her) salvation, as you do for your own?**
 - 3) **Do you now unreservedly dedicate your child to God, and promise, in humble reliance upon divine grace, that you will endeavor to set before (him/her) a godly example, that you will pray with and for (him/her), that you will teach (him/her) the doctrines of our holy religion, and that you will strive, by all the means of God's appointment, to bring (him/her) up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?**
 - 4) (To the congregation) **Do you as a congregation undertake the responsibility of assisting the parents in the Christian nurture of this child?**
- d. Then the minister is to pray for a blessing to attend this ordinance, after which, calling the child by name, he shall say: **I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.** As he pronounces these words, he is to baptize the child with water, by pouring or

sprinkling it on the head of the child, without adding any other ceremony; and the whole shall be concluded with prayer.

C. The Lord's Supper

1. The sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord's Supper, or Communion, is a sacrament of the Church, given by Jesus Christ. This sacrament, which is to be observed by the Church, is for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Jesus in His death, sealing all the benefits of that death unto true believers for their growth and the engagement of them unto Christ-like behavior in thought, speech, and deed.
2. As an integral aspect of our worship, CHRC normally celebrates communion at the Lord's Table weekly and enjoys the particular blessing of the Spirit's work through this sacrament during our worship.
3. Elders administering the Lord's Supper shall fence the table by instructing those present concerning who is qualified to partake of the Lord's Supper, indicating that any who are not in covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ or who are covenant-breakers are to refrain from the Table. Heads of households are also expected to instruct certain household members to refrain from the Table when there is unresolved sin. Continued sin and unrepentance, however, should always be communicated to the Session for counsel. The administering elder shall provide for a time of preparation prior to serving the elements of bread and wine. This time may include reminders, exhortation, admonition, or instruction. This will include the admonishing of all professing believers to examine themselves, to discern the Lord's Body, and to partake of the Supper in a worthy manner (not failing to consider reconciliation with other members of the church; see Matthew 5:23–24). Since Christians are warned about faulty (unworthy) participation in this sacrament (1 Corinthians 11:27–32), it is evident that this sign is more than simply a memorial. Those who disregard this scriptural teaching by participating in the sacrament in an unworthy manner will experience more harm than good. Covenantal blessings and curses are associated with the Supper of the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:29, 30).
4. The Session of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church teaches the position and practice of paedocommunion, in which the baptized children of covenant members partake of the Lord's Supper. Those who disagree with the paedocommunion position are encouraged to act according to their consciences without contention and with humility.
5. In accordance with the desires of those families who practice believer's communion, the Session, whose office it is to judge, will carefully examine the qualifications of those members who apply for admission to the Lord's Table by profession of faith. Upon their profession of faith, these persons shall be admitted into communing membership using the form and questions found in Article III.B.1.

Article XI. Biblical Counseling and Confidentiality

A. Biblical Counseling

1. All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships (Romans 3:23; 7:7–25). Whenever a Christian is unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through private efforts, God commands that he should seek assistance from other members, and especially from the Session, which has the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1–2; Colossians 3:16; 2 Timothy 3:16–4:2; Hebrews 10:24–25; 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its members to make confession of sin and to seek counsel from each other and especially from our pastoral counselors.
2. We believe that the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life; therefore, our counseling shall be based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Neither the pastoral nor the lay counselors of this church are trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals.

3. Although some members of the church work in professional fields outside the church, when serving as pastoral or lay counselors within the church, they do not provide the same kind of professional advice and services that they do when they are hired in their professional capacities; therefore, members who have significant legal, financial, medical, or other technical questions should seek advice from independent professionals. The church's pastoral and lay counselors shall be available to cooperate with such advisors and to help members to consider their advice in the light of relevant scriptural principles.

B. Confidentiality

1. The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matthew 7:12). The Bible also discourages harmful gossip (Proverbs 16:28; 26:20), invites confession (Proverbs 11:13; 28:13; James 5:16), and encourages people to seek needed counseling (Proverbs 20:19; Romans 15:14). Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the Gospel and the work of this church, all members are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our Session shall carefully protect all information that it receives through pastoral counseling, subject to the guidelines that follow. Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as is possible, there are times when it is biblically necessary to reveal certain information to others. In particular, the Session may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in certain circumstances such as, but not limited to, the following:
 - a. When the Session is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other officers in this church or, if the person attends another church, from the officers of that church (Proverbs 11:14; 13:10; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; Matthew 18:15–17), or
 - b. When the person discloses information about himself or any other person that suggests imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Proverbs 24:11–12), or
 - c. When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to institute disciplinary proceedings (Matthew 18:15–20).
2. Scripture commands that confidential information is to be shared with others only when a problem cannot be resolved through the efforts of a small group of people within the church (Matthew 18:15–17); therefore, except as provided in the guidelines listed above, the officers of this church may not disclose confidential information to anyone outside the church without the approval of the Session or the consent of the person who originally disclosed the information. The Session may approve such disclosure only when it finds that all internal efforts to resolve a problem have been exhausted (1 Corinthians 6:1–8) and the problem cannot be satisfactorily resolved without the assistance of individuals or agencies outside this church (Romans 13:1–5). This limitation shall apply to, but is not limited to, the giving of testimony in a court of law and the reporting of abuse.
3. The Session (or officers) may, but need not, provide counselees with written notice of these confidentiality provisions, but these provisions shall be in effect regardless of whether or not such notice is given.

Article XII: Arbitration

A. Process Leading to Arbitration

1. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church is committed to resolving all disputes that may arise within our body in a biblical manner. This commitment is based on God's command that Christians should strive earnestly to live at peace with one another (Matthew 5:9; John 17:20–23; Romans 12:18; Ephesians 4:1–3) and that when disputes arise, we should resolve them according to the principles set forth in Holy Scripture (Proverbs 19:11; Matthew 5:23–25; 18:15–20; 1 Corinthians 6:1–8; Galatians 6:1). We believe that these commands and principles are obligatory on all Christians and absolutely essential for the well-being and work of the church; therefore, in the event of any dispute, claim, question, or

disagreement arising out of or relating to these bylaws or any other church matter, the parties shall use their best efforts to settle such disputes, claims, questions, or disagreement as befits Christians in the following manner:

- a. When a member of this church has a conflict with or is concerned about the behavior of another member, he shall attempt to resolve the matter as follows:
 - 1) The offended or concerned person shall prayerfully examine himself and take responsibility for his contribution to a problem (Matthew 7:3–5), and he shall prayerfully seek to discern whether the offense is so serious that it cannot be overlooked (Proverbs 19:11; see also Proverbs 12:16; 15:18; 17:14; 20:3; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 4:8).
 - 2) The offended or concerned person must first confess his own wrongdoing (Matthew 18:15). Then, if the offense is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned person shall go, repeatedly if necessary, and talk to the offender in an effort to resolve the matter personally and privately.
 - 3) If the offender will not listen and if the problem is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned person shall return with one or two other people who will attempt to help the parties resolve their differences (Matthew 18:16); these other people may be members or officers of the church, other respected Christians in the community, or trained mediators or arbitrators (conciliators) from a Christian conciliation ministry. At the request of either party to the dispute, the Session shall make every effort to assist the parties in resolving their differences and in being reconciled.
 - b. At every stage of dialogue, both parties shall consult and negotiate with each other in good faith and, recognizing their mutual interests not to disgrace the name of Christ, seek to reach a just and equitable solution.
2. Conflicts involving doctrine or church discipline shall likewise be resolved according to the procedures set forth on church discipline.

B. Notice of Arbitration

If a dispute arises which cannot be resolved through the internal procedures described above, the dispute shall be submitted to mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration, as follows:

1. If the parties involved do not reach an equitable solution within a period of sixty (60) days, then upon notice by either party to the other, disputes, claims, questions, or differences shall be finally settled by arbitration as described below, and such Procedures for Arbitration as are adopted by the Session of CHRC.
2. All mediators and arbitrators shall be in agreement with the doctrinal standards of CHRC unless this requirement is modified or waived by all parties to the dispute.
3. If a dispute submitted to arbitration involves a decision reached by an official judicatory (court or ruling body) of this church or affiliated denomination, the arbitrators shall uphold the highest judicatory's decision on matters of doctrine and church discipline.
4. This section covers the church as a corporate body and its agents (officers, staff, and volunteers) with regard to any actions they may take in their official capacities.
5. This section covers any and all disputes or claims arising from or related to church membership, doctrine, policy, practice, counseling, discipline, decisions, actions, or failures to act, including claims based on civil statute or for personal injury.
6. If a dispute or claim involves an alleged injury or damage to which the church's insurance applies, and if the church's insurer refuses to submit to mediation or arbitration as described in this section,

either the church or the member alleging the injury or damage may declare that this section is no longer binding with regard to that part of the dispute or claim to which the church's insurance applies.

C. Submission to Arbitration

Believing that lawsuits between believers are prohibited by Scripture; therefore, by joining this church, all members agree to submit to binding arbitration any matters between members which cannot otherwise be resolved, and expressly waive any and all rights in law and equity to bringing any civil disagreement before a court of law, except that judgment upon the award rendered by the arbitrator may be entered in any court having jurisdiction thereof.

D. Limitations on Arbitration Decisions

1. Should any dispute involve matters of church discipline, the arbitrators shall be limited to determining whether the procedures for church discipline were followed.
2. Should any dispute involve the removal from office of any church officer, the arbitrators shall be limited to determining whether the procedures for removal of officers were followed.

E. Arbitration Procedures

The Procedures for Arbitration shall be as adopted by the Session.

Article XIII: Subordinate Ministries

1. The Session may unanimously delegate to an individual or board the executive authority of any subordinate ministry established by the Session. This executive responsibility continues at the pleasure of the Session.
2. In order to dismiss such an individual, or remove someone from such a board, a three-fourths vote of the Session is required. If the individual concerned is also an elder, he is excluded from voting on any matters concerning his own case.
3. Separation of a subordinate ministry from Covenant Heritage Reformed Church may be authorized by a unanimous vote of the Session.
4. All formal actions concerning subordinate ministries will be entered in the minutes of the Session meetings.

Article XIV: Incorporation and Tax Status

A. Incorporation

1. As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Covenant Heritage Reformed Church is not constituted or incorporated by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church.
2. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church maintains its status as an unincorporated and unregistered church as a matter of conscience. In as much as corporations are creatures of the state in which they are incorporated, we affirm our intention to permanently maintain the unincorporated status of the church thereby avoiding any obfuscation of the sole headship of our Lord Jesus Christ over His church.
3. As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Covenant Heritage Reformed Church accepts various burdens and entanglements of civil regulation and taxation under protest.

4. Covenant Heritage Reformed Church has constituted herself, under the authority and headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an association of natural persons, and recognized as such by the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

B. Tax Status

Covenant Heritage Reformed Church is a duly established, constituted, and functioning church, and is therefore non-taxable. The tithe given to the church is man's affirmation of God's sovereign, original ownership over His creation. Tithes (defined as one-tenth of one's net increase (Leviticus 27:32)) and offerings (gifts given in excess of the tithe) are the Lord's, and should not be subject to any tax penalty by the state. Each household may, in good conscience, take a tax deduction for both their tithes and offerings given to CHRC. A 'statement of giving' for each tax year will be made available by the following Jan 31st.

C. Designated Contributions

From time to time the church, in the exercise of its religious, educational, and charitable purposes, may establish various funds to accomplish specific goals. Contributors may suggest uses for their contributions but all suggestions shall be deemed advisory rather than mandatory in nature. All contributions made to specific funds or otherwise designated shall remain subject to the exclusive control and discretion of the Session and the board of deacons. No fiduciary obligation shall be created by any designated contribution made to the church other than to use the contribution for the general furtherance of any of the purposes stated in Article I.

Article XV: Affiliation

Covenant Heritage Reformed Church affirms the Presbyterian model of church government, both as an individual congregation and as a member of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC). CHRC also seeks to maintain fraternal ties with all Christian congregations as far as possible given differences of opinion on various issues of doctrine and practice. As a member of the CREC and per the requirements of the CREC, CHRC adopts the constitution of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches in its entirety as part of the constitution of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church.

A. Joining a Denomination

The process of establishing official membership in a denomination shall be as follows:

1. Upon unanimous approval by the Session, a congregational meeting shall be called for the sole purpose of discussing the proposal to join with the desired denomination. No motions shall be made at this meeting.
2. After a minimum one month waiting period, and upon unanimous approval by the Session, a congregational meeting shall be called to vote on joining with the desired denomination. A three-fourths majority is required to sustain the motion to join.
3. The results of this meeting shall be communicated to the appropriate officials representing the denomination, requesting that they act in accordance with their Constitution to receive CHRC as a member congregation.
4. Membership in a denomination shall not be finalized until the governing body(ies) of the denomination have taken the appropriate action in accordance with their Constitution to establish/confirm the congregation's membership.

B. Withdrawing from a Denomination

The process of dissolving the official membership in a denomination shall be as follows:

1. Upon approval by a three-fourths majority of the Session, a congregational meeting shall be called for the sole purpose of discussing the proposal to withdraw from membership in a denomination. No motions shall be made at this meeting.
2. After a minimum one month waiting period, and upon approval by a three-fourths majority of the Session, a congregational meeting shall be called to vote on withdrawing from the denomination. A sustained motion at this meeting shall commence the process of withdrawal. A three-fourths majority is required to sustain the motion to withdraw.
3. The results of this meeting shall be communicated to the appropriate officials representing the denomination. The denomination shall be given adequate opportunity to respond to the intended withdrawal of CHRC from membership. This may include meetings between officials of the denomination and the congregation of CHRC.
4. After a minimum three month waiting period from the time of the initial vote to withdraw, and upon approval by a three-fourths majority of the Session, a congregational meeting shall be called to vote a second time on withdrawing from the denomination. A sustained motion at this meeting shall finalize the process of withdrawal. A three-fourths majority is required to sustain the motion to withdraw.
5. The results of this meeting shall be communicated to the appropriate officials representing the denomination; however, the membership of CHRC in the denomination shall have been terminated upon sustaining the second motion to withdraw.

C. Dissolution

If it becomes necessary for the glory of God and for the mutual benefit of the members to dissolve the congregation of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church, the process shall be as follows:

1. Upon unanimous approval by the Session, a congregational meeting shall be called for the sole purpose of discussing the proposal to dissolve the congregation of Covenant Heritage Reformed Church. No motions shall be made at this meeting.
2. After a minimum three month waiting period, and upon unanimous approval by the Session, a congregational meeting shall be called to vote on dissolving the congregation. A unanimous vote is required to sustain the motion to dissolve the congregation.
3. Upon the dissolution of the church, the treasurer shall, after paying or making provision for payment of all the liabilities of the church, dispose of all of the assets of the church to such organization or organizations formed and operated exclusively for religious purposes as shall at the time qualify as an exempt organization or organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law), as the Session shall determine. Assets may be distributed only to tax exempt organizations which agree with the church's Statement of Faith.

Article XVI: Amendments

1. The provisions of Article XVI shall not be subject to amendment in any form, either by addition, deletion, or alteration. Apart from Article XVI, this Constitution may be amended at any time through the consent of the Session, when the following conditions have been first fulfilled:
 - a. A motion to make a proposed amendment to the Constitution is sustained by a unanimous vote at a stated meeting of the Session. This motion shall state the specific wording of the proposed change(s).

- b. A written copy of the proposed change(s) shall be made available to the congregation at least three weeks prior to a subsequent stated meeting of the Session.
 - c. The Session seeks due consultation with the heads of households of the church at a subsequent stated meeting of the Session. The motion in its original form shall be presented and sustained by a second unanimous vote.
2. 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 on a case-by-case basis by the unanimous judgment of the Session. Under such circumstances, the heads of households will be informed, and the Constitution amended at the first opportunity.

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