

Covenanting Association

of

Reformed and Presbyterian Churches

Covenant

We, the undersigned, as Ministers of the Word, and Elder Delegates from our respective home Churches, in obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Head and Lawgiver over His people, to love one another, spread the Good News of His kingdom and grace throughout the world, and to do good to all persons, especially to those of the household of faith, do hereby unite ourselves together as a covenanted Association for our mutual edification, help, and encouragement in the areas of evangelism, ministry, counsel, and relief. To this end we pledge our good will and efforts to cooperate together to promote the cause of Christ in this world in accordance with the commands of God expressed in His Holy and Infallible Word, the Bible, in full dependence upon the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, to supply us the wisdom, power, and grace to do all things in a manner well pleasing to Him, for the good of His people and the glory of His Holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.

Governing Principles & Organization

Preamble

In order to do all things decently and in good order, and to so govern ourselves that Christian love and fellowship in the service of Christ our Sovereign Lord may be encouraged, and an expressed equality among ourselves and mutual respect for the gifts and grace by each one may be manifested, we do hereby adopt by our unanimous consent the following principles to guide and govern our relationship as fellow believers and local Congregations united through faith in Jesus Christ, under His Word, as an Association and Council of Ministers and Elders in the service, extension, and edification of His Church.

Principles

I. Doctrinal Standard

1. The written Word of God, which is the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, shall be in all points and in every subject before this Association the ultimate and authoritative standard of truth in all doctrine and practice.

II. The Creeds & Subordinate Doctrinal Standards

1. The three ecumenical Creeds, commonly known as the Apostles, the Nicene, and the Athanasian, shall be received as true and in harmony with the doctrines of the Trinity and of the Person and Natures of our Lord Jesus Christ as taught in the Holy Bible.
2. The subordinate doctrinal standards of this Association shall be the Westminster Confession of Faith with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, or the Three Forms of Unity, known as the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Canons of Dort, and the Heidelberg Catechism.
3. No person, Church, or association shall hold membership in any form in this Association which do not freely confess the teachings of these Creeds.
4. All ministers, elders delegates, and Churches received into the voting membership of this Association must subscribe to the above documents as true and in harmony with the system of doctrine taught in the Scriptures.

III. Membership

1. Membership in this Association shall be voluntary, and any member, whether an individual or Church, may withdraw from the membership of this Association at his or its own discretion without further appeal or reference to this Association.
2. Individual Ministers of the Word, who are currently serving as the called pastors of member local Churches, and Elders, who are currently serving as active Elders in member local Churches, shall alone be received as the voting membership of this Association.
3. Except for the founding member Churches, membership in this Association shall be by nomination from a member Church or individual in a meeting of this Association.
4. After nomination, a unanimous (100%) vote of the members present and voting in a subsequent meeting to be held no less than four weeks after and no more than one year from the time of the nomination, shall be necessary to receive the nominated Church into the voting membership of this Association.
5. Any voting member of the Association shall have the right to question the delegates from a nominated Church as to their history, doctrine, and practice prior to any vote being taken on their membership.
6. Only biblically qualified males holding the ordained office of Minister of the Word or ordained Elder, shall be received as voting members and delegates of this Association.

7. Men (males) serving as ordained active Deacons in member Churches may be seated in the bar of the meetings of the Association and given the privilege of the floor, but shall not vote in the meetings of the Association. They may also serve as non-voting members of committees relating to the deaconal work of the Association.

IV. Associate Membership

1. Ordained emeriti ministers of the Word, associate pastors (whether actively serving, or awaiting a new call), and ordained but inactive Elders of member Churches, may be received as associate members of the Association with floor privileges through the unanimous vote of the Association, but they shall not have a vote in the meetings nor serve as officers of the Association.

V. Discipline and Removal from Membership

1. Removal of any Church or member from the membership of this Association shall be by fifty-one percent (51%) vote of the members present and voting.

2. The Church or member must be notified in writing of the reasons for removal at least one month prior to the meeting in which the vote is to be taken.

3. The Church or member shall be given the opportunity to defend itself or himself in an open meeting of the Association prior to the vote for removal.

4. The vote to remove from membership shall be taken in the same meeting in which the defense is heard.

5. The delegates who make and second the motion to remove from membership, shall not be allowed to vote on that particular removal from membership in the Association.

6. Neither the delegates from the Church being voted on for removal, nor any member being voted on for removal, shall vote on any motions relating to their own removal, nor introduce any motions or seconds while the motion to remove them is active before an assembly of the Association, though they shall have the privilege of the floor, and may speak to the matters before the Association.

7. Discipline in the Association shall not proceed beyond removal from this Association.

VI. Meetings of the Association & Quorum

1. All meetings of this Association shall begin with the election of a moderator for that particular meeting, then the roll shall be called to determine a quorum, promptly after which the moderator shall read a chapter from the Holy Bible and offer an opening prayer or ask another member to do so.

2. A quorum shall consist of ten (10) member delegates, or fifty-one percent (51%) of the delegates from the member Churches, whichever is less. If there is no quorum the moderator shall announce that no business shall be conducted for lack of a quorum and thus the meeting is adjourned.
3. After adjournment of such a gathering, the reading from the Holy Bible and prayer and may be enjoined. His function as moderator shall cease with the adjournment of that particular meeting of the Association.
4. The meetings shall conclude their last session with the reciting of the Nicene Creed, the Lord's Prayer, a Benediction, and singing of a Doxology.
5. A vice moderator and recording secretary shall also be elected at the beginning of each meeting following the opening prayer.
6. The recording secretary shall keep the minutes of the meeting, shall read the concept minutes before adjournment and make the final copy of the minutes available to the members of the Association within two weeks of its close.

VII. Rules of Meeting & Unanimity

1. All decisions of this Association shall be by the unanimous consent of the present voting members, unless otherwise stated in the body of these Principles.
2. The general rules of parliamentary procedure shall be observed in the meetings of this Association, except where otherwise stated in these Principles.
3. The moderator may rule out of order any parliamentary maneuver or motion which he believes to be detrimental to the good order and business of the Association.
- 4 His ruling shall stand unless overridden by the vote of the membership present.
5. Any ruling of the moderator may be challenged, and all such challenges, if seconded, shall be immediately voted upon.
6. A fifty-one percent (51%) vote of the membership in attendance is needed to override the ruling of the moderator.

VIII. Calling of Meetings of the Association

1. Meetings may be called at the request of any Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory of a member Church, or by two or more Ministers of different member Churches. (The term "Consistory," as used throughout this document, is, for the purposes of the

governing principles of this Association, understood to refer only to the active ruling Elders and Ministers of the word in member Churches.)

2. The time and place of the meeting shall be announced in writing at least one month ahead of time.
3. Those requesting the Association to meet shall state their reasons in this prior notice and shall make sure all member Churches have been notified by making a follow-up contact.
4. Other matters of business may be brought before the Association by proper motion and may be deliberated during the meetings unless these Principles require a specific time for notification for said matters of business.
5. Attendance at Association meetings shall be voluntary only. At no time shall any discipline be enacted against a member Church which fails to send delegates to the meetings of this Association or against an any member for failure to attend the meeting of this Association.
6. Member Churches which do not send delegates to a duly called meeting of the Association, or members who cannot attend said meeting, should, as a courtesy to their brethren, send written notification to the hosting Church in advance stating the reasons for their non-attendance.
7. If a member Church does not send delegates to three consecutive meetings of the Association without weighty reasons, a motion to remove it from membership may be brought during that third meeting, in accordance with the rules in these Principles, article V above.
8. Male Ministers, Elders or Deacons from non-member Churches and honored guests may be seated in the bar of the Association's assemblies as observers and given the privilege of the floor by the unanimous consent of the members present, but such observers shall not introduce any business nor vote.

IX. Association Authority and the Hearing of Charges

1. Without the expressed written consent and permission of the Minister(s) and the Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory of a member Church from which an appeal, referral, or complaint is made, no such business shall at any time be admitted for adjudication by this Association.
2. The actions and decisions of this Association are advisory only. Therefore they should be received by the member Churches as brotherly advice and should be acted upon by the free decision of the Sessions, Spiritual Councils, or Consistories of the

member Churches where they believe them to be in accordance with the principles and commands of the Holy Bible.

3. No action or decision of this Association shall at anytime overturn the action or decision of the Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory of a member Church.

4. Matters referred to the Association by a Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory shall be heard in either open or closed session of the Association, according to the request of the referring Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory.

5. The moderator may rule any charge or business out of order. Unless such a ruling is immediately successfully challenged from the floor, it shall stand. Also, any delegate may move to have any charge or business declared out of order, and if it is seconded and passed by a 51% majority of the voting members present, the motion to declare the charge or business out of order shall stand.

6. Charges against a Minister of the Word must be presented in writing, stating the specific individual charge(s) or complaint(s) with witnesses named for each item. Charges not in proper form shall be referred back to the local Church of origin.

A. Charges or complaints shall not be heard in closed session without the prior expressed consent of both the accused and the accuser; and by the request of the accused, the decision reached in closed session may be announced in an open session of the same meeting of the Association in which the charges and defense have been heard.

B. Reasonable time for the purposes of gathering evidence, securing depositions, or for any other reasonable purpose toward assuring a fair and impartial hearing of the charges against a Minister of the Word shall be given. Also, for the same purpose, at his request, the accused shall be granted a postponement of the hearing of said charges.

C. The length of the time for a postponement in hearing a charge against a minister shall be determined and announced to both parties at the time the request is granted.

D. Any charge or business brought before the Association which the moderator believes to be improperly before it may be ruled out of order by him, or a motion to have it declared so may be made by the members present and voting, and if the motion passes, the charge or matter shall not be heard in that meeting.

E. Nothing shall ever be done by the Association which would impede the fair hearing of the accused or accuser, or that would not give the accused every reasonable opportunity to answer the charges or complaints against him in order to clear his name.

F. Anyone accused before the Association shall have as his right the presumption of innocence before and during the proceedings of the Association.

G. Any member delegate of the Association who has favorably listened to gossip or slander against the accused by the accuser(s) in personal conversation or correspondence via telephone, letters, email or any other means, for the sake of honesty and fairness, must in the presence and fear of Almighty God, voluntarily dismiss himself from speaking, voting, or by any other means influencing the hearing(s). Any member delegate, who, during the course of the hearing(s) is discovered to have engaged in such ungodly and wicked tactics and who has not voluntarily dismissed himself from the proceedings of the hearing(s) shall be immediately removed from that meeting of the Association, and shall be subject to removal from its membership by vote of the Association. The delegates shall completely ignore anything such a delegate has said or done to influence the hearing of the Association or the outcome of the hearing. Those who are named as the accusers in the written charge(s) or complaint(s) brought before the Association shall be viewed as having acted in good faith and for the welfare of the Churches, unless otherwise proved in the course of the hearing.

H. The decision of the Association relating to both the accused and the accuser shall be given in the form of advise and counsel to the parties concerned, but may also include exhortation, admonition, rebuke, censure, and/or a recommendation for the discipline of the local Church against those doing wrong.

I. A guilty verdict, along with any recommended punishment(s), must be by the unanimous consent of the voting members of the hearing. If the Association cannot reach a decision at the conclusion of a hearing, the accused shall be treated as innocent of the charges and the matter referred back to the Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory of origin. The vote of the hearing as to the innocence or guilt of the accused shall be taken during the same meeting in which the final defense from the accused has been heard.

J. If the accused is found innocent by the Association's hearing of the charges or complaints brought against him, the accuser's reasons for bringing the said charges or complaints shall be immediately examined by the Association. If it is discovered that beyond a reasonable doubt the accuser acted from evil motives, the punishment or discipline that he intended for the accused shall be brought against the accuser himself by the unanimous vote of the voting members of the hearing.

K. Upon a decision obtained by a fair hearing in the Association in regard to either the accused or accuser, in accordance with the principles of the Word of God and as set forth in this article, any member of the Association may motion to remove that individual or Church, whether the accused or the accuser, from its membership, which vote shall be immediately taken without further debate.

7. No discipline shall be taken against any individual member, Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory which fails to follow the advise of the Association, unless such

failure to heed shall constitute a clear violation or disregard to specific commands in the Holy Scriptures.

X. Committees of the Association

1. The Association shall never establish any permanent standing committees to do the ministry and work of the Association during the time periods between its meetings. Rather, all such ministry and work shall be referred to the Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory of the appropriate local Church, which shall report to the next meeting of the Association.

A. Such referral shall not be understood to prohibit or discourage cooperation between meetings among the Ministers and Elders of the various member Churches in ministries of mutual concern.

B. Responsible parties who fail to report or accomplish a reasonable level of service between meetings may be subject to exhortation or admonition by the Moderator of the Association. If such failure is repeated, according to the wisdom of the Association, that particular ministry or work of the Association may be referred to a different Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory.

C. This article shall not prohibit or discourage the appointment or election of committees during any particular meeting of the Association. However, all such standing committees shall dissolve upon the adjournment of that particular meeting of the Association in which they were formed.

XI. Finances and Dues

1. No payment of any dues, assessments, membership fees, or monetary donations of any kind shall ever be required from any local Church, Minister of the Word, or Elder who hold membership in this Association or to join it.

2. No financial or other contribution of material value shall ever give any Church or individual office bearer more rights or votes than those enjoyed by all the other Churches or office bearers in any meeting, committee, or ministry of this Association.

3. All funds for particular ministries or works of charity and relief recommended by the Association to the local Churches shall be received, held, managed and dispersed by the Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory responsible for the care and oversight of that particular ministry.

A. Said responsible party has free, exclusive, and full authority with regard to said ministry.

B. Member Churches may be encouraged to voluntarily contribute finances and services to the recommended ministries.

C. When the above recommendation and encouragement has been made, the responsible Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory shall regularly report to the meetings of the Association about the ongoing work, services, needs, and finances of the recommended ministries.

XII. The Freedom of The Local Church

1. No Minister, Elder, Deacon, Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory of a member Church of this Association shall ever interfere in the internal ministry or discipline of another Church in this Association without the expressed written invitation and consent of that particular Church's Minister, Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory.

2. The above article shall not be understood to discourage or limit the mutual fraternal fellowship and cooperation between the Ministers, Elders, Deacons, Sessions, Spiritual Councils, or Consistories of the Association's member Churches in matters relating to their personal friendships, private pastoral counsel, and social contacts.

XIII. Students under Care of the Association

1. Only biblically qualified males in good standing in member Churches shall request through the Minister of the Word and Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory of their local Church to be received as students under care of this Association for the Ministry of the Word.

2. They shall, at the time they are received as students under care of the Association, be placed under the direct pastoral oversight of a member Minister of the Word in their local Church.

3. At the conclusion of each calendar year the student under care shall submit a written report of his progress, activities, and studies to the members of the Association.

4. At the same time the student's overseeing Minister and local Church's Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory also shall submit a yearly written report to the members of the Association relating to the student's progress, activities, studies, and evidence of his calling.

5. Students under the care of the Association may exhort and teach the Word by the invitation of the member Churches, but they shall not administer the Sacraments of Baptism or the Lord's Supper.

6. When a student under care has satisfactorily completed his training for the ministry, upon the unanimous vote of the Association, he shall be eligible to apply for Licensure to preach and, after Licensure by the Association, to receive a call to the pastoral ministry of a local Church.

XIV. Licensure and Ordination

1. When the local Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory receives a request and application for Licensure from a student under care, upon both its approval and that of his overseeing Minister, the Session, Spiritual Council, or Consistory shall request a meeting of the Association so that the student may be examined.

2. When the student has satisfactorily passed oral and written examinations the Association may, by its unanimous vote, license him to preach in the Churches and be available for a call.

3. When an individual so licensed receives a call from a local Church, the calling Church shall arrange for the Association to gather at an ordination worship service of the calling Church in order to ordain the candidate as a Pastor and Minister of the Word in Christ's Church with prayer and the laying on of hands of the Ministers and Elders present, or a reasonable number selected therefrom.

4. At the next meeting of the Association he shall be received as a Minister of the Word and voting member.

5. The above procedure shall also be followed when a Church calls a licensed candidate to serve as a Church planting Minister or Missionary at home or abroad.

6. No one shall ever be ordained and installed as the Pastor of a local Church without the prior informed approval by vote of the general membership of that local congregation in accordance with their own Constitution and By-Laws.

7. This shall not be understood to prohibit the Association from ordaining to the ministry of the Word such qualified men as a member local Church may call and send to labor as foreign or domestic missionaries or as Pastors in Church planting ministries.

XV. Relationships with other Presbyteries or Associations

1. This Association shall not unite organizationally, join, or receive with any other assembly, association, fellowship, or denomination without the unanimous consent of the individual members and Churches present and voting in no less than two separate duly called meetings of this Association. The two separate meetings shall be held no sooner than four weeks apart, and no later than one year apart.

2. The above article shall not be understood to discourage cooperation and fellowship by the individual members and Churches in areas of ministry, evangelism, and relief with other branches of Christ's Church who hold to sound doctrine and practice.

3. Individual members and Churches in this Association may hold membership in other Christian organizations, associations, societies, and fellowships without jeopardy to their membership in this Association, so long as such other membership does not represent fellowship with or promotion of apostasy, heresy, or immorality.

XVI. Amendments and Changes

1. Modifications, amendments, and changes may be made to these articles by the unanimous consent of the members present and voting at a duly called meeting of this Association,

A. Written notice of such proposed modifications, amendments, or changes must be given to the member Churches no less than four weeks prior to the stated meeting

B. The vote on such proposed modifications, amendments, or changes must take place no more than one year from the time of the first reading in a meeting of the Association.

2. The approved modifications, amendments, or changes may be effective immediately, if such a desire was indicated along with the written notice and first reading. Otherwise they shall go into effect at the next stated meeting following the meeting in which the vote was taken and then passed.

XVII. Ratification

1. This document shall become the sole and official binding constitution of this Covenanting Association of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches by a vote of approval of the congregations and Sessions, Spiritual Councils, or Consistories of two or more local Churches, according as the dictates of their own local Church constitutions shall determine such vote to be made and approved.

2. Upon its ratification by the vote of two or more local Churches, the Sessions, Spiritual Councils, or Consistories of those Churches shall arrange a meeting of the Association to be held no less than six weeks and no more than six months from the time of the final ratification, so that the Minister(s) of the Word and delegate Elders, with thanksgiving and praise to God, may, on behalf of the ratifying Churches, publicly sign the Covenant of this Association and begin to attend to the ministry and work of this Association.

"Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly

above all that we ask or think,
according to the power that works in us,
to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus to all generations,
forever and ever.
Amen."

Ephesians 3:20-21

THE END