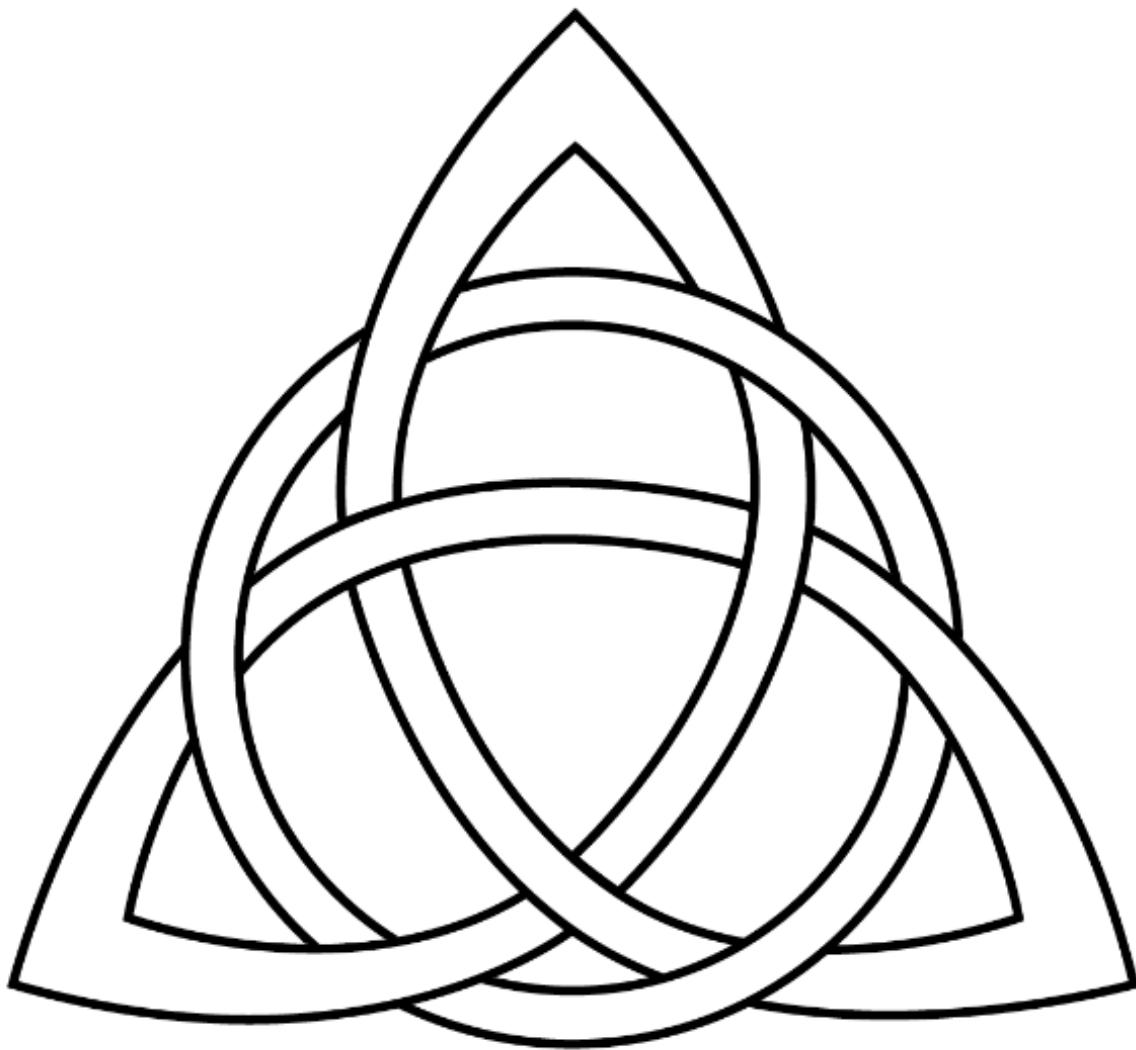


Christ Church

REFORMED • EVANGELICAL



FORM OF GOVERNMENT
AND
BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

Christ Church
of Pace, Florida

A Congregation of the
Communion of Reformed
Evangelical Churches (CREC)

Form of Government

and

Book of Confessions



PREAMBLE

Jesus Christ, the Head and King of the Church

Jesus Christ, upon whose shoulders the government rests, whose name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace; of the increase of whose government and peace there shall be no end; who sits upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom to order it and to establish it with judgment and justice from henceforth, even forever (Isaiah 9:6-7); having all power given unto Him in heaven and in earth by the Father, who raised Him from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and has put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all in all (Eph. 1:20-23); He, being ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things, received gifts for His Church, and gave all offices necessary for the edification of His Church and the perfecting of His saints (Eph. 4:10-13).

Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, King, Prophet, Savior, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminency, all the offices in His Church, and has many of their names attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He is Apostle, Teacher, Pastor/Shepherd, Deacon, Bishop, and the only Lawgiver in Zion.

It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thus, exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, for the edification and establishment of His Kingdom through these humble means of the Ministry, Word, and Sacraments, throughout the earth, to the end of the world.

Christ, as King, has given to His Church patterns of government, community, and worship, for the maturing of his people and the manifestation of His glory in the world. All things needed for doctrinal truth and the practice of godliness are contained in His Word, the Church's supreme authority. The only standard by which all matters of faith and life may be determined is the voice of Christ, speaking through His inspired Word.

Since the ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, He is present with the Church by His Word and Spirit, and the benefits of all His offices are effectually applied by the Holy Spirit by means of the Word proclaimed and the Sacraments administered. All these benefits are received by faith alone as the sole instrument of union with Christ and His body.

The Church, the Body and Bride of Christ

We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We believe that the Church is the family and royal priesthood of God the Father, the body and bride of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the fellowship and temple of God the Holy Spirit. We believe that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church. We believe that the Church is one in all ages and is founded upon Christ Jesus, crucified and risen, as the Chief Cornerstone. We believe that through the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ will fulfill His commission as the Last Adam to fill the earth with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea and to subdue every enemy of God, death being last of all.

We acknowledge that the Church of God, purchased with Christ's blood, is manifested in diverse but united particular congregations in all the earth. We believe that the Church is one in Christ, as all Christians and all local communions are joined together as living members of His mystical body. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, to which all of God's people belong. This mystical union in Christ is the basis and root of our organizational unity.

We believe that it is the duty of each Christian to be committed to a Biblically ordered congregation, under the rule of elders, ordinarily located in their geographic area. Christ Church of Pace, Florida (Christ Church) has been so constituted by Christ through His duly ordained representatives as a particular congregation of the body of Christ. We believe that churches are to be connected with one another in a conciliar fashion, as representative elders, or presbyters, come together in assemblies to share in the governance of the Church. Thus, for the purpose of manifesting our oneness in Christ, as well as mutually cooperative shepherding, oversight, accountability, discipline, and mission, our presbytery affiliation is the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC). We submit to all the constitutional requirements that come with CREC membership. However, our desire for mutual ministry and mission is not limited to the churches of our presbytery or denomination. We long for the oneness of Christ's many congregations to be manifested publicly and governmentally in the world, through shared councils and common ministry and mission. This unity need not mean uniformity, but it should mean that bonds of mutual love and trust are evident. We long to labor with other congregations in doing the work of the kingdom in Word, Sacrament, and service. Our motto towards our fellow Christians and sister churches is the familiar refrain: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."

Our Identity: Reformed, Evangelical, Catholic

Christ Church stands in the Reformational tradition of historic protestant orthodoxy, with its emphasis on *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *soli Deo Gloria*, *sola scriptura*, and *solus Christus*. Just as the sixteenth century Reformers sought to recover the centrality of the gospel and the sovereignty of God in salvation, as well as correct errors that had crept into the life, liturgy, and doctrine of the Church, so we believe the Church militant ought to be ever reforming, until she finally becomes the Church triumphant. Building on the work of the Reformers and continuing their legacy, we desire to call the broader Church back to Christ and his gracious gospel, that the Savior might be honored in all nations; we desire to see Christians matured as faithful followers of Christ in all of life and culture, that they might serve God with excellence in their daily vocations; and we encourage the ongoing study of Scripture, as God's inexhaustible revelation of truth, goodness, and beauty, that the Reformed church might be continually reformed more and more according to the Word of God.

Christ Church is an evangelical church, confessing with our mouths and believing in our hearts the saving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. As evangelicals, we seek to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ as the power of God unto salvation, for Christ alone is the way, the truth, and the life. We are motivated and inspired by an evangelical spirit to herald the gospel in all of creation, that sinners might be converted and saved, that the nations might be discipled, and that the rule of Christ might be made visible to the ends of the earth. As evangelicals we insist that true religion is not just a matter of public membership in the institutional Church (as vital as that is as the context in which salvation is ordinarily experienced), but also a loving, trusting, personal relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ the Son and by the working of the Holy Spirit.

Christ Church is a catholic congregation, confessing one faith, one Lord, one baptism. As catholics, we rejoice in our connection with the communion of the saints, throughout the world and throughout the ages. As catholics, we lament the fractured state of the Church in our day, we join our prayers to those of Jesus that all those the Father has given him might be one in love, and we labor to manifest our unity with all other faithful Christians in whatever ways possible. We affirm that genuine catholicity means unity in the truth, and so we endeavor to seek both the peace and purity of the Church. We affirm that the unity Christ calls us to already exists in principle, but should also be made manifest in the ministry, mission, and polity of the global church. We deny that catholicity requires us to compromise our convictions, rooted in Scripture and the historic Christian tradition, in order to serve an ecumenical agenda. We view the CREC as a confederation of churches within the catholic Church; as a subset of the broader catholic Church, we desire to see ever greater unity with other churches and collections of churches, in doctrine, government, and mission.

Preliminary Principles and Denominational Commitment

The purpose of our Church's existence is to fulfill Christ's mission of gathering the nations into His kingdom and maturing them into His obedient and faithful people, through means of Word, Sacrament, and service, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. At the center of our Church's life is gathered worship, in which God renews covenant with us and gives us the gifts of His kingdom.

As a presbyterian Church in the Reformed tradition, we hold to a representative, hierarchical, conciliar form of government. The Church is ruled by the session, which consists of men ordained to the offices of pastor and ruling elder, as described elsewhere in this Constitution. The Constitution of Christ Church consists of the "Form of Government" and the "Book of Confessions." As a local congregation, Christ Church may choose its own officers (in conjunction with the approval of presbytery in the case of ministers of Word and Sacrament), admit members and perform excommunications, withdraw from the CREC and pursue a different denominational connection at any time, revise its Constitution, and possess its own property. This Constitution does not claim to perfectly or comprehensively reflect the Bible's teaching on Church polity; while our desire is to be as biblical as possible in our given circumstances, respecting our traditions and customs, this document remains a fallible human product. As such, officers and members are not expected to agree with every detail, but do need to be willing to live under its terms. While a biblically shaped polity serves the well being of the church, it is not of the essence of the church; thus, a community of believers can be regarded as a true church even if their polity is not fully in accord with the teaching of Scripture.

The Church is biblically and historically defined by her three marks: faithful preaching of the gospel; right administration of the sacraments; and the proper exercise of church discipline. Churches may be more or less pure, more or less healthy, depending on their degree of fidelity in these three areas. Some churches degenerate so far from biblical norms they can no longer be regarded as true churches, but have become synagogues of Satan. Prayerfully, and by the grace of God, Christ Church will mature in biblical faithfulness in each area for generations to come.

Christ Church desires to be at peace with all other faithful churches. We lament the fragmented state of Christendom and long for the day when God's churches will be united as one visible family under the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. We see our membership in the CREC as a way of practicing biblical ecclesiastical polity under compromised circumstances. We long for an ever widening connection with the Church catholic. Should Christ Church ever desire to leave the CREC for another denominational affiliation, Christ Church may do so with the session's approval and a two-thirds majority vote at a congregational meeting, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. But Christ Church shall aspire to only leave in a peaceable and orderly manner, treating our brethren with respect, and with a commitment to joining another association of faithful churches as soon as possible.

Christ Church acknowledges that God alone is Lord of the conscience; that while reason and tradition are helpful guides in Church life, all human authorities are subordinate to the Word of God in matters of faith and practice; that Christ has instituted a government and officers in His Church to preach and protect the purity of the gospel, to administer the Sacraments according to the prescriptions of the Word, and to shepherd, discipline, and serve the flock as needed; that the Church has genuine authority, as its officers and courts represent the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, with the power of the keys to bind and loose; that Church councils and courts may and have erred, and therefore all Church power is but ministerial and declarative, not absolute; that we are called to dwell together in brotherly love, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, and praying for one another, so that the world may know that we are Christ's disciples and that He is the One sent by the Father; that we are to seek to maintain the bond of peace and unity in the faith with all other faithful Christians, ministering alongside one another in word and deed, no matter their denominational connection; and that we are duty bound to work for the end of the denominational system and the establishment of a truly catholic and Reformed church in the world.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in Christ Church as a Particular Body

Membership in our local expression of Christ's Church is constituted by a profession of faith, sealed in baptism. Baptism is the rite of initiation into the covenant of grace and the means of admission to the catholic Church; the one baptized maintains good standing in the Church by walking in faith, by the grace of God.

Membership at Christ Church is "catholic," open to Christ's disciples of all races and ages. While baptism marks out membership in the catholic Church, professing believers, including children, ordinarily enter the membership of Christ Church, as a local body, when they have approval of the session. Usually, new members will be expected to swear their membership vows in front of the session, or representatives thereof. Vows may also be taken publicly, in the context of a covenant renewal worship service, as the session deems prudent.

Those joining Christ Church from outside the catholic Church officially, as new believers or covenant children, join at their baptisms; those already baptized join Christ Church when the session has approved their transfer of membership (or if they have no Church they are currently members of, they join when the session, or representatives thereof, approves their profession of faith).

Children born to at least one member parent (or belonging to a member sponsor/guardian) are regarded as heirs of the covenant even before baptism, and become full members of Christ Church at their baptisms.

The elders of Christ Church are responsible to examine the orthodoxy of all candidates for membership, and to see that their lives do not contradict their professions. The session should make sure that all candidates coming for membership by transfer have been baptized in the Triune name. The session may delegate the task of meeting with prospective members to a commission of two elders. In exceptional, emergency circumstances baptism may be performed without a formal session interview (e.g., an infant in danger of dying), though such actions should be reported to the session as soon as possible. Interviews with prospective members should include a discussion of the candidate's Christian experience/life, the content of the membership vows, and ways in which the Church and new member can mutually serve and bless one another.

Membership vows include:

1. Do you acknowledge that apart from God's sovereign mercy, you are a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His wrath, and without hope?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you trust in Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel, as priest, king, and prophet?
3. Do you now promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will strive to live a life of repentance and obedience, in a manner worthy of the followers of Christ?
4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to pursue its purity and peace?

Incoming Transfers

If those requesting membership in Christ Church are presently members of another congregation, the session of Christ Church will ordinarily send a request of transfer to the leadership of that congregation. If no reply is made in thirty days, the Christ Church session may proceed with the membership transfer. It is the desire of Christ Church to respect the governmental actions of other churches as much as possible. No one baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to be rebaptized. If the prospective member has been under discipline in another congregation, a full investigation is to be made and the session issue a ruling.

Records of Membership

The session of Christ Church is to keep careful records of membership, including baptisms and communicant members, for the purpose of providing loving oversight of the congregation. The session should always keep the congregation informed of changes in Church membership, at the very least by keeping accurate and accessible records.

Associate Membership

In special circumstances, persons who hold membership in another congregation may come under the pastoral care of Christ Church without becoming full, voting members of Christ Church. In these cases, permission should be secured from the person's home Church. Associate memberships may be dissolved on request, and the person returned to the full care of their home Church.

Release or Transfer of Membership

If any member requests to be released to the care of another Christian Church, he should notify the session. The session will release him with a blessing or admonishment, as the session deems appropriate. If any member requests a release while under Church discipline, the session will delay acting on the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved. The matter can be resolved by acquittal, repentance, censure, or excommunication; or, if the Christ Church session is reasonably confident the receiving Church will continue the disciplinary process in a biblical manner, the member may be released into the pastoral care of that Church, with a complete report of the matter passed along to the governance of that Church.

If members move from our geographic area, they are charged to find a new Church home within six months. This time may be reduced or extended at the session's discretion. After this time is expired, they are released from membership and pastoral oversight, though they should be encouraged to properly transfer to a new body as soon as possible.

Members of this Church who willfully, without plausible reason or excuse, consistently absent themselves from Lord's Day worship for more than three months shall be subject to Church discipline, as the session deems appropriate, for the purity of the Church and the Spiritual health of the absent member. This time may be shortened or extended as the session deems fit. If it is not possible to pursue a full course of church discipline, the absentee member may be erased from membership with censure, which may be regarded as a functional excommunication, as the session deems appropriate. Such erasures are viewed as disciplinary cases without process. If a member begins attending another Church without transferring membership over an extended period of time, longer than twelve months, he may have his name erased from the membership roll of Christ Church without discipline.

Communicant Membership

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for overseeing the administration of the Sacraments remains with the elders. Sacraments belong to the Church and not to families. However, the elders of Christ Church will respect the desires of parents with regard to the administration of the Sacraments, in accord with our “Paedocommunion/Credocommunion Cooperative Agreement” (APPENDIX #1). Parents who desire to include their baptized children at the table are welcome to do so. Parents who wish to delay communing their children until they can make a suitable profession of faith may do so; their children will be regarded as non-communing members by the session until they are formally admitted. All baptized children are subject to the nurture and discipline of the Church, along with their parents.

Electors and Elections

Electors are communing members of the Church, customarily age sixteen and above. The session may revoke voting privileges as part of the disciplinary process. Voting will take place by electors in the election of Church offices and orders, including pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons; if necessary, the dismissal of those same officers; the amending of the Constitution; leaving the CREC and making a new ecclesiastical affiliation; and other times the session may deem wise or necessary, such as major property transactions. The session must provide two week’s notice before all voting. Votes should ordinarily be held in conjunction with a Lord’s Day service to maximize attendance. At least half of the congregation’s voting membership must be present as a quorum for a vote. A passing vote requires the affirmation of two-thirds of those voting. Absentee ballots are available to electors in good and regular standing, but must be requested at least one week before the day of the vote.

OFFICERS AND ORDINATION

Offices

The following table lays out the various offices and orders that Christ Church recognizes, as well as our terminology:

Elders/Presbyters (Session)	Diaconate	
Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Teaching Elders): Pastors/Ministers	Ruling Elders	Deacons

Jesus Christ has appointed several offices for the edification and growth of His Church. The extraordinary offices of apostle and prophet have now ceased, as their revelatory, foundation-laying roles in redemptive history are complete (Eph. 2:20). Christ Church's form of government includes and makes provision for the following ordinary and perpetual offices: pastor/teacher (minister), ruling elder, and deacon. Pastor/teacher (minister) is an office of Word and Sacrament. Ruling elder is an office of service and rule. Deacon is an office of service and stewardship, under the oversight of the session. Deacons are assistants to the elders, with a special calling to minister mercy, primarily among the family of God, and secondarily in the world, as well as performing other assorted tasks. The session may create additional non-authoritative orders of men and women within the congregation to provide service and give assistance to the officers.

The New Testament uses the term “elder” (or “presbyter”) with great breadth, to refer to both officers who minister in Word and Sacrament, as well as ruling elders, who do not ordinarily preach, teach, or administer the Sacraments. A distinction between elders who rule and elders who are also responsible for teaching and the Sacraments is made in Scripture (2 Chron. 19:8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:17-4:2), with the latter linked to the Old Covenant priestly office as its new covenant counterpart (1 Cor. 9:13). Hence, we officially distinguish ruling elders and those elders who are lawfully ordained to be Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, as pastors. Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and ruling elders co-labor together in shepherding the flock as members of the same session (1 Pt. 5:2-4), but these various types of elders differ in respect to personal calling, gifts, function, and (strictly speaking) office.

Officers in Relation to the Local Church

It is lawful and proper that there be fixed congregations, that is, a certain company of Christians who meet in one assembly at a regular time and place for public worship, under the oversight of officers. When believers multiply to such a number that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, under one session, it is practical that they divide into distinct local congregations, for the better maintenance of worship and government, and for the fulfillment of their mutual duties to one another. The ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct congregations, and most conducive to edification, is by the respective bounds of their dwellings (parishes). This is because those who dwell together, being bound to one another as neighbors, generally have better opportunity to fulfill these obligations to one another. It is our desire to be a congregation that multiplies herself, as God prospers us.

For officers in a single congregation, there ought to be one pastor at least, both to labor in the Word and to administer the Sacraments, and to rule as a shepherd. It is also vital that there should be at least one ruling elder to join the pastor in the government of the Church. Likewise it is most helpful that there be deacons to take special care for the relief of the poor. The number of each office is to be proportioned according to the condition and needs of the congregation. If and when the church is without sufficient pastoral and/or sessional leadership, the congregation should ask presbytery for additional oversight until such leadership can be properly established.

Selection and Calling of Officers

The session of elders will examine any potential candidate for office with regard to his doctrine and manner of life. If he has any disagreement or reservation about any portion of the Church's doctrinal views as expressed in the Constitution (specifically this Form of Government and the Westminster Standards), then he must inform the session of it. The session will determine if such a scruple excludes the candidate from office. All candidates must meet the general qualifications for the office set down in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pt. 5:2-4). If an officer later changes his views on some matter that would require taking an exception to the Constitution, honesty and integrity require that he should notify the appropriate Church courts as soon as possible for a ruling about his continued fitness for the office. Ministers of Word and Sacrament should notify the session and presbytery; other officers should notify the session.

In the case of a pastor/teacher (minister), the candidate should also be examined by presbytery as to his fitness for ministry in terms of both doctrine and life. Candidates for ministry of Word and Sacrament should ordinarily have some formal theological training under the oversight of a body of elders. They should also have proficiency in all areas of theology and Church history, and have gifts of preaching and/or teaching. All the procedures of the CREC related to ministerial calling should be followed. The terms of a pastoral call, including compensation, vacation time, ministerial expenses, etc., shall be determined by the session when a call is issued, and then reviewed annually. Because he labors in the gospel, a Minister of Word and Sacrament shall ordinarily draw his living from the gospel, receiving support from the tithes and offerings of the congregation (1 Cor. 9:1-8; Gal. 6:6).

If a man is already ordained to the office for which he is a candidate at Christ Church, his examination, by whatever Church court is involved, does not have to be comprehensive. His earlier ordination should be examined as to its validity, he should be interviewed with regard to his fitness for office and his calling, and he should be prepared to discuss his exceptions to the Christ Church doctrinal standards and Constitution.

Nominations to any Church office may be received from any elector at any time, provided that it is delivered to the pastor or clerk of the session. The session and diaconate may also nominate candidates for office. Willing nominated individuals who are approved with the consent of the session will normally undergo some training, instruction, and examination, as the session desires and schedules. This will be carried out under the oversight of the pastor. The session, after the time of training, instruction, and examination is complete, may approve the nominee, or not, for election.

If a candidate is not approved for office by the session, he may request from the session a list of deficiencies or areas of concern, stated in biblical terms, and a proposed course of action for remedying these concerns.

After a candidate is approved for election, the voting ballot will provide the option of voting yes, no, or abstain. If the candidate is elected by at least a two-thirds vote, the elders will ordain him through laying on of hands and prayer at an appropriate time, according to specifications of the Christ Church Constitution.

Once in office, the officer will serve for life, unless he resigns, retires, or is removed from office or is elected for another office. Leaves of absence from service in these offices may be granted by consent of the session. The length of the leave of absence should be agreed upon by both the officer and the session. Even while on sabbatical, the officer holds his office, but he is not expected to carry the ordinary workload in the life of the Church. The status of Church officers should always be communicated to the congregation.

The first time an officer tenders his resignation the session may refuse to accept. However, if the officer still desires to resign by the time of the next session meeting, or one month later, his resignation must be accepted and the congregation notified.

Officers may be granted emeritus status from the session as a way of honorably retiring from office. The session can make any officer “emeritus” with a two-thirds vote. Emeritus officers hold an emeritus title, and may still be engaged in the work of the church (including preaching and administering the sacraments as requested by the session), consulted by the other officers for wisdom, and are worthy of honor for their time of active and official service to the church, but are no longer voting members of the session or diaconate and are relieved of their other official duties.

The Session and Diaconate: Organization, Procedures, and Responsibilities

Under Christ, as the Head and King of the Church, the power of Church rule has been vested in the session, composed of all elders, including pastors and ruling elders in the local Church (2 Chron. 19:8). Ordinarily, the Church should be ruled by a plurality of qualified elders. The moderator of the session, responsible for calling and overseeing meetings, is the pastor. One member of the session shall serve as clerk and be responsible for the session’s communications to and from other Churches, the presbytery, and the congregation. The clerk is elected by the session to a two-year term, and may serve unlimited consecutive terms.

The session must meet at least twice a year. All meetings are open to the public, though the session may call executive meeting times when necessary. In meetings, the clerk of session will record accurate minutes of the actions taken by the session. Minutes are to be submitted back to the whole session for approval. Meeting minutes are available to any member of the congregation upon request. In all meetings of the session of presbyters, each elder has one vote; the moderator only votes in cases of ties. In the session, decisions are made and motions enacted by simple majority vote, unless otherwise stated in this Constitution.

The elders as a session are collectively responsible for ruling and shepherding (1 Pt. 5:1-2); equipping (Eph. 4:11-12); gathering the people for covenant renewal worship (Heb. 10:25); leading in times of prayer and fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3); teaching and preaching (1 Tim. 5:17); determining and overseeing admission to the Sacraments, which are baptism and the Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26); administering Church discipline and restoring offenders (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5); counseling with members as needed (Prov. 11:14); and praying for the healing of the sick, including anointing with oil (Jas. 5:14-15). The session may also create (and dissolve) committees, commissions, orders, and boards, dedicated to particular areas of ministry in the life of the Church. The session may choose to subdivide the congregation into parishes, under the oversight of particular elders, for shepherding purposes, if deemed wise. The session may also draft and approve position papers, memorials, and resolutions that speak the mind of the Church to particular issues. More specific duties of each office within the eldership are described below.

The session constitutes the Church's legally incorporated representatives, or trustees, and as such, may act on the Church's behalf. The elders in session are also authorized to delegate responsibilities to the deacons, hire and fire Church staff, define responsibilities for Church staff, delegate responsibilities to the staff for subordinate ministries, approve the annual budget and expenditure policies, make decisions about Church property, and organize various non-authoritative "orders" of Church members for service and assistance. The session may only hire staff whose lifestyle and theological convictions are in line with the overall vision and mission of Christ Church. Christ Church does not discriminate in employment with regard to race, color, or national origin. In line with biblical requirements and historical precedent (1 Tim. 2:9-15; 3:1-7), only men of sufficient age and maturity will be considered for pastoral/ministerial staff positions. Employees may be terminated for conduct or beliefs inconsistent with Christ Church's doctrinal and ethical standards, as well as failure to adequately perform their assigned responsibilities. The session bears full responsibility for making such judgments. The session also commissions or licenses ministerial students, and oversees the course of their training for the eldership. In all these ways, the elders act jointly, not severally, under the oversight and leadership of the pastor.

All church-related concerns and complaints should be brought to the attention of the session. A member should present concerns that are grave in nature to either the pastor or clerk of the session for consideration by the session. All members of the Church are welcome and invited to call upon the session (or any individual member thereof) for special counsel, for prayer, or for confession of sin and absolution.

The session is responsible for sending the pastor and one additional delegate to all CREC presbytery and council meetings, in accord with the CREC constitution. The pastor is a permanent delegate to all higher courts, though he may choose to send a substitute in extenuating circumstances. The delegate in addition to the pastor may be chosen by a vote of the session. Delegates are to vote their conscience at higher assemblies, but should also consider the desires and will of the entire Christ Church session.

The diaconate is the body of deacons. In the diaconate, decisions are made and motions enacted by simple majority vote. The diaconate should elect an archdeacon to serve a two-year term. The archdeacon is responsible for organizing the diaconate, calling and overseeing meetings, ensuring minutes for meetings are recorded, and serving as a liaison between the diaconate, the session, and the congregation. The diaconate is also responsible for electing a treasurer to a two-year term to make necessary and accurate financial reports. The treasurer does not have to come from within the diaconate, provided another member of the congregation is willing and able to serve in this capacity. There is no limit to the number of consecutive terms archdeacons and treasurers may serve. The session may replace an archdeacon or treasurer at any time. The diaconate must meet at least twice a year.

Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the Church (Acts 6:2-4). Such responsibilities include preparing and administering the annual budget to be approved by the session, building maintenance, fellowship meals and festivals, administrative support, mercy ministries, and distribution of the deacons' fund to those in need. The deacons may be divided into specialized orders if expedient.

A joint officer ("consistory") meeting of all elders and deacons together must be held at least once a year, under the oversight of the pastor/moderator. The session should plan at least one congregational meeting a year, to update the congregation on the life of the Church and to make the budget available. The pastor shall serve as moderator of congregational meetings, though the session may choose to appoint another elder to be moderator in his place, if needed. The clerk of the session is responsible for keeping minutes in joint officer and congregational meetings. In congregational meetings, the congregation should always be given ample time to ask questions and discuss matters, especially before a vote.

Ordination

Ordination is a rite which includes the laying on of hands and prayer, to set a man apart to a particular office and function within the Church. Insofar as ordination confers office in the Church, with attendant privileges and responsibilities, it is an act of God, not merely the human officiants. Insofar as ordination represents the will and desire of the people to delegate its powers to gifted and recognized men, it is an act of the Church. Ordination is effective by the grace of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, in accord with biblical teaching. The practice of ordination is important to good order within the life of the Church. Any man who is to be ordained must affirm that he is inwardly called of God to the office and must also have an outward call to office extended to him through the Church. With regard to ordination, we uphold these principles:

No man ought to take upon himself any ecclesiastical office without a lawful calling. A man should only be ordained if he has a call to a particular work or service in a local body or mission field. Only qualified, examined, and elected men have been duly called to office, and only such are to be ordained.

Ordination is always to be continued in the Church, but officers are only to be ordained into a particular office one time. If a man has already been ordained to office in another local Church, he is to be installed, rather than re-ordained, in the new Church that has called him.

Ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some public Church office. Ordination is a ritual of the Church through which the Spirit confers all the privileges and obligations of the office to which the man has been called. A man is ordained into a particular office, whether Minister of Word and Sacrament, ruling elder, or deacon. No man should be ordained to the same office more than once, but if he is called and elected to a new office, he should be ordained into the new office. (Pastors, teachers, and evangelists share a common ordination, even though they differ in the specialized nature of their callings.)

Every officer is to be ordained by the imposition of hands, and prayer, by a body of elders. Elders who regularly minister in Word and Sacrament participate in all ordinations by virtue of their office and as representatives of the presbytery. Ruling elders participate in ordinations of other elders and deacons as representatives of the congregation. In cases of an installation, the elders are to pray, and may lay hands on the man if deemed appropriate.

Elders from other faithful presbyteries and denominations are welcome to participate in the ordination services of Christ Church since their offices are recognized and respected.

In the ordination of a man to an office of ministry in Word and Sacrament, it is most fitting to include fellow officers of Word and Sacrament who minister at other congregations in the same presbytery. In this way, the Church shows its submission to and cooperation with the whole presbytery in calling the man to be ordained.

It is agreeable to the Word of God, and very expedient, that when officers are ordained or installed, that both the man and congregation should be charged in a fitting way to fulfill their responsibilities to one another.

Ordinations and installations should take place in a public assembly of the Church, preferably a Lord's Day covenant renewal service.

Ordinations should be followed by the right hand of fellowship in order to welcome the man into his new office.

Vows are not the essence of the ordination ritual. But vows made by both the officer (-elect) and the congregation are mutually edifying, as both parties promise to serve one another in their respective spheres, in mutual dependence upon the Lord's mercy.

Vows for a Minister of Word and Sacrament

When a pastor (or other minister of Word and Sacrament) is ordained, he and the congregation are to take the following vows. The vows and declaration are best administered by another pastor from the presbytery. The laying on of hands and prayer are to be inserted between the vows of the man and the vows of the congregation.

QUESTIONS TO THE PASTOR-ELECT

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, as being true to 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 presbytery and session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church as being in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of pastor 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. Have you been led, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?
7. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace and unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise against you on that account; and do you commit yourself in the sight of God and before Christ Jesus to fight the good fight of faith, to take hold on eternal life, to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses?
8. Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties and obligations as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, whether personal or relational, private or public; and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, and to walk in fashion worthy of imitation before the flock of which God shall make you overseer?
9. Are you now willing to take charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to fulfill in this congregation the duties of a pastor, not lording it over the people, but living among them as one who serves, as a representative and ambassador of Jesus Christ?

10. Do you promise to pay careful attention to yourself, and to all the flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you an overseer, and to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood?

QUESTIONS TO CONGREGATION

1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your pastor?

2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him as unto Christ in the due exercise of ministry and discipline?

3. Do you promise to encourage him in his work, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and Spiritual edification, as he labors to represent Christ to you?

4. Do you engage to continue to him while he is your pastor that competent worldly maintenance which you have promised, and to furnish him with whatever you may see needful for the honor of religion and for his comfort among you?

Pastor: I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, ordained, and installed as Pastor of this church, agreeable to the Word of God, 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 Spirit. Amen!

People: Amen!

When a pastor (or other minister of Word and Sacrament, already ordained) is installed, he is to take the following vows. (The congregation takes the same vows as at an ordination. The same declaration may be made as well, omitting the word “ordained.”)

QUESTIONS TO THE PASTOR:

1. Are you now willing to take charge of this congregation as their pastor, agreeable to your declaration in accepting its call?

2. Do you conscientiously believe and declare, as far as you know your own heart, that, in taking upon you this charge, you are driven by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God and the good of the church?

3. Do you solemnly promise that, by the assistance of the grace of God, you will endeavor faithfully to fulfill all the duties of a pastor to this congregation, and will be careful to maintain a godly manner in all respects, as becoming a minister of the Gospel of Christ, agreeable to your ordination?

4. Do you promise to uphold all the vows of your ordination, with regard to confessional subscription and ministerial integrity, doing all your duties in such a way that your labor serves the peace, purity, and edification of the church, to the glory of God?

All vows may be modified as needed to accommodate men called to various ministries of Word and Sacrament, or the roles of assistant or associate pastor.

Vows for a Ruling Elder

When a ruling elder is ordained or installed, he and the congregation are to take the following vows. The laying on of hands and prayer (at an ordination service) are to be inserted between the vows of the man and the vows of the congregation.

QUESTIONS FOR RULING ELDER(-ELECT)

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt in good faith the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, as being true to 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 approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, as 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?

QUESTION FOR THE CONGREGATION

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as elder, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which this office, according to the Word of God and the constitution of this church, entitles him?

Pastor: I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected and, ordained, and installed as an elder in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, 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 Spirit. Amen!

People: Amen!

If the ruling elder is being installed rather than ordained, the same vows are to be used, though the word “ordained” may be omitted from the declaration.

Vows for a Deacon

When a deacon is ordained or installed, he and the congregation are to take the following vows. The laying on of hands and prayer (at an ordination service) are to be inserted between the vows of the man and the vows of the congregation.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DEACON(-ELECT)

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt in good faith the Westminster Confession and the Catechisms of this Church, as being true to 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 approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, as in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of deacon 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?

QUESTION FOR THE CONGREGATION

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as deacon, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which this office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this church, entitles him?

Pastor: I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, and ordained, and installed a deacon in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, 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 Spirit. Amen!

People: Amen!

If the deacon is being installed rather than ordained, the same vows are to be used, though the word “ordained” may be omitted from the declaration.

DUTIES AND PRIVILEGES OF OFFICERS

New Covenant Officers in General

As suggested above, the Church of Jesus Christ inherited a form of government from old covenant Israel. While this pattern has been transformed and adapted to the new covenant situation, the precedents and principles of the old covenant system are still relevant and instructive as a model for Church polity. The Church, as the New Israel, is to fulfill Israel's calling in history, through Christ. Analogies between old covenant and new covenant positions look roughly like this:

Old covenant prophets and priests = New covenant Ministers of Word and Sacrament
Elders of the people/gate, judges, kings/shepherds = Ruling elders
Levites, assistants/apprentices = Deacons

The ministry of the priests, as well as apostles and prophets is carried on in the work of the Ministers of Word and Sacrament. However, these ministers do not claim prophetic or apostolic inspiration; instead they build upon the foundation that has already been laid once and for all in the apostolic era (Eph. 2:20). Ministers of Word and Sacrament fulfill the priestly role, as the primary liturgical and sacramental officers of the Church; and the prophetic role, as they declare and apply God's Word to the congregation and the world, and they lead the people in intercessory prayer before the throne of grace. In their governing role, they work with the other elders.

Elders of the people, or ruling elders, are not, properly speaking, liturgical or teaching officers, but rather focus on overseeing the people the other six days, outside of Lord's Day gathered worship. Their work is to build up and strengthen the community, providing wise oversight and direction. As "chief laymen," they are responsible for maintaining good order and justice in the community, acting as judges, peacekeepers, and counselors. Along with the Ministers of Word and Sacrament, they oversee the formal Church discipline process.

Deacons have the most flexible job description, as the elders determine what they are to do in a given situation. They are to Ministers of Word and Sacrament what Levites were to the priests; or what Joshua was to Moses; or what Elisha was to Elijah; or what Gehazi was to Elisha; or what Baruch was to Jeremiah; etc. They are assistants to elders, and may be apprentices-in-training, as well. Deacons may function as specialists in almost any area of Church life – mercy ministry, teaching, music, stewardship, administration, liturgical assistance, etc. But the diaconal office is not one of authority or governance in the Church. Deacons may be permanent, or may transition into a form of eldership at an appropriate time. In general, they do those things that allow the elders to focus more directly on the ministries given to them as members of the Church session; thus, we find in the biblical record, new covenant deacons are especially called upon to care for those in need (Acts 6:1-6). This mercy ministry function is the central assigned task of the diaconate at Christ Church, though the session may direct the diaconate or individual deacons to engage in other works as well, in accord with the nature of the office as described below.

Without attempting to be exhaustive, we now turn to the specifics of each called ministry in the Church.

The Office of Pastor (or Minister)

The pastor is an ordinary and perpetual officer in the Church (Eph. 4: 11; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). The pastorate is especially the new covenant counterpart to the old covenant priesthood, even as each local congregation is a miniature fulfillment of the typology of the old covenant temple. The pastor is the primary servant-priest among and towards the royal priesthood of the whole congregation, with the goal of presenting the people in Christ as an acceptable offering to the Father, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16). It especially belongs to the pastoral office,

To pray for and with his flock, as the mouth of the people unto God; to pray publicly for the people, especially in gathered worship; to pray privately for and with the people, especially for the sick; and to pray for the lost;

To oversee the planning and leading of the Lord's Day liturgy, as the priests of the Old Covenant led the people in worship at the tabernacle and temple;

To read, preach, and teach the Scriptures publicly, as the mouth of God to people, even as the priests in the Jewish Church were trusted with the public reading and exposition of the Word;

To study the Scriptures diligently, in order to feed the flock divine truth, as he preaches, teaches, convinces, reproofs, exhorts, and comforts from the Word;

To train the people to live as a royal priesthood, offering Spiritual sacrifices in all of life, and especially in gathered worship;

To administer the Sacraments publicly, and privately in emergency situations, as the priests under the Law administered the sacrifices;

To declare absolution to the Lord's repentant people, both publicly in gathered worship, and privately, after they have confessed their sins;

To bless the people from God, declaring a benediction, as the priests did under the Old Covenant;

To encourage husbands and fathers to be faithful in loving their wives as Christ loves the Church and in raising their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord; to encourage wives and mothers to be diligent and faithful by caring for their families with joy and contentment; to encourage singles to pursue purity and service in accord with their vocations; and to encourage children to grow towards maturity in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ;

To take care of the poor, in conjunction with the other officers;

To pray for and anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord, when called upon;

To represent the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, in lovingly caring for and disciplining the flock in conjunction with the other elders;

To authorize and deputize a ruling elder or deacon to administer the Lord's Supper in his absence;

To lead the session as moderator and overseer;

To represent the local congregation as a permanent delegate to all higher assemblies of the Church;

To serve as bishop, or superintendent, over a collection of local Churches, or moderator of presbytery, if so called.

Should the Church ever be without a pastor, it should strive to secure one without delay (Mt. 9:36). The elders should seek out suitable nominees as necessary; the elders may form a pastoral search committee from members of the congregation to help in the work of identifying and recommending suitable candidates, if desirable. The elders will examine a nominee with regard to his doctrine, manner of life, and confessional adherence. In addition to the qualifications for elder, pastoral candidates must meet the biblical criteria for shepherds (2 Samuel 12:1ff, Ps. 23, John 10:11-16, etc.). Following this process, the elders may approve the nominee as a candidate to be placed on a ballot. The electors will be asked whether or not a call to the pastorate should be extended to him; the ballot will include an option to abstain. If the candidate is approved by two-thirds vote in an election, the elders will extend a provisional call to him to be pastor. His call to be pastor is finalized only after the CREC's presbytery duly approves him. Following CREC approval, he may be ordained (if necessary) and installed as pastor. (It is also lawful for the candidate to be examined by the presbytery before a vote of the congregation. In such cases, the congregation's call is not provisional.)

While Christ 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 officers, as described below. For cases that do not involve moral failures or disciplinary proceedings (e.g., Acts 15:33-41, Rom. 15:22-33, 1 Cor. 16:5-12), the procedure for terminating the call of a pastor, thereby dismissing him from service at Christ Church, is as follows: The pastor may submit his resignation to the session. If the session accepts his resignation, he is relieved of his pastoral call to Christ Church. If the session does not accept his resignation, he may tender it again at the next session meeting, or after at least one month has passed, in which case it must be accepted.

If Christ Church is without a pastor, it should seek the aid of presbytery so that a regular ministry of the Word and celebration of the Sacraments may continue. No man not ordained to be a Minister of Word and Sacrament may take upon himself the task of preaching apart from the permission of the session, or the task of regularly administering the Sacraments apart from the permission and appointment of presbytery or the moderator of presbytery. It is crucial that the offices and order of the Church be maintained even in times of transition.

As need and resources dictate, Christ Church may call a man to serve as a pastoral assistant or associate pastor. The assistant is to be called by the session and after examination by the session and presbytery, ordained and/or installed according to the principles of the Constitution. An assistant does not have a vote on the session, and may not serve as a delegate to a higher court, but he does have full power to minister the Word and the Sacraments. An associate is called in the same manner, except his call also requires the election of the congregation by a two-thirds vote. He becomes a member of the session and may be a delegate to a higher court. Job responsibilities for assistants and associates are to be determined by the session, under the oversight and leadership of the pastor.

The Office of Ruling Elder

As there were in Old Covenant Israel elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the Jewish Church, so Christ has instituted governors in the New Covenant Church, commonly called ruling elders (2 Chron. 19:8; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28). These men are “elders of the gate,” or “elders of the people,” called upon to oversee the social life of the community as “chief laymen.” They are to be wise and God fearing men, fit for leadership. Their work is primarily *circum sacra* rather than *in sacris*. Ruling elders are especially gifted in governing, though they may have other gifts as well. Governing the Church as a ruling elder is a matter of serving and caring for the people, setting before them a godly example in vocational and familial life, counseling and encouraging them, and engaging in discipline as needed. It is imperative that ruling elders know the people of the congregation well and command their trust and respect.

Ruling elders differ from other elders (the Ministers of Word and Sacrament) in that they are not subject to examinations from presbytery with regard to their call to office; they typically have daily vocations outside the Church; and they usually do not receive remuneration from the Church for their services. However, on the session, they rule jointly with the other elders and have the same formal authority. They may serve as representatives of the Church in presbytery and council meetings.

It especially belongs to the office of ruling elder,

To serve on the session, and thus rule the people;

To advise Ministers of Word and Sacraments in their special work and represent the congregation on the session;

To oversee the doctrine and practice of the flock;

To set an example of godliness in all things;

To act as peacekeepers and judges in cases of dispute;

To pray with and for the people, especially in time of illness; and to anoint the sick with oil when requested, along with the Ministers of Word and Sacrament;

To counsel and nurture the members of the congregation towards godliness, encouraging and correcting them as needed;

To assist the pastor in leading the liturgy when needed or appropriate;

To assist in the distribution of the Lord’s Supper and the collection of tithes and offerings;

To execute Church discipline when and as situations require it;

To join with the deacons in caring for the poor and needy.

Ruling elders labor beside Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in lovingly shepherding and disciplining the people. In times of necessity or in the absence of an officer ordained to administer the Sacraments, the pastor or presbytery or moderator of presbytery may appoint a ruling elder to administer.

The Office of Deacon

The Scripture holds out deacons as distinct officers in the Church. Deacons are called to be assistants to the Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Acts 6:1-6) just as the Levites were assistants to the priests; and also to act as assistants to the ruling elders, operating under their oversight and authority. Deacons can be gifted and used in a wide variety of ways in the life of the Church. Deacons serve in ways authorized by the elders, freeing the elders to focus on their more specialized tasks. Primarily, it belongs to the office of deacon,

To take special care in mercy ministries and in meeting the needs of the poor, the immigrant, the prisoner, the fatherless, and the widow, first within the household of God, and second, in the world;

To befriend the friendless, and care for those in distress, in times of illness, bereavement, or other adversity, after the example of the Lord Jesus Christ;

To disburse funds from the Church treasury on behalf of the session;

To encourage the rest of the Church's membership to excel in hospitality and benevolence, ministering to one another and to those outside the Church in deed as well as word;

To assist the music ministry of the Church as needed, able, and directed by the session;

To teach the flock and evangelize the lost, as needed, able, and directed by the session;

To assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper and the collection of tithes and offerings;

To assist in the Church's liturgical feasts and fellowship meals;

To make recommendations to the session about budget and property, as stewards of the Church's resources and assistants to the elders;

To care for and maintain the property of the Church.

While the office of deacon is not ordinarily one of administering Word and Sacrament, in times of necessity or in the absence of an officer ordained to administer the Sacraments, the pastor or presbytery or moderator of presbytery may appoint a deacon to administer.

Men are who training for an elder ministry may serve as deacons as part of their preparation, to test their gifts, gain experience, and prove their faithfulness.

Resignation or Removal from Church Office

While Church offices are ordinarily perpetual, sometimes officers have their call terminated for providential or moral reasons. If an officer desires to resign or take a leave of absence, he will present his request to the session. The length of a sabbatical should be agreed upon by the officer and the session. If the session approves, it will notify the Church. If the session does not accept the resignation, the officer may offer it again at the next session meeting, or in a month, at which time it must be accepted.

If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal irregularity, then the resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate Biblical discipline.

As already noted, officers may be granted emeritus status from the session as a way of honorably retiring from office.

Members are urged to be extremely reluctant to bring charges against any officer, covering over offenses and overlooking shortcomings in a spirit of brotherly love, and remembering what the Bible says about those who bear false testimony and judge others (especially rulers) harshly. If two or three witnesses believe an elder or deacon to be morally or doctrinally unfit for office, then they may present charges to the session (1 Tim. 5:19). If the session (excluding the accused from voting, in such a case) decides that the question is worthy of an investigation and/or hearing, at their discretion they may inform the congregation of the charges, announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or hearing, and encourage members (especially heads of households) to attend. If the charges are sustained by the other elders after trial, then the accused officer, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction, may be rebuked by the session (1 Tim. 5:20), or may be removed from office (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), or both. If the charges prove to be slanderous, those who brought them may be subject to censure by the session.

In case an officer under discipline has charges against him sustained, his call to office may be involuntarily terminated by a vote of the session (excluding said officer, if he is an elder). In such a case of removal from office, the officer may have recourse to the voting members by calling for a vote to either sustain his call as officer or not (with an option to abstain). If the voting members sustain his call by a two-thirds majority vote, the other elders must afterwards either concede to his call or refer the matter to the CREC courts for binding arbitration.

An officer may also be relieved of his office at any time if three-fourths of the congregation petitions the session to that effect. The elder may appeal the action of the congregation to the higher courts of the CREC, according to any provisions of the CREC Constitution, if he believes the congregation has acted without sufficient warrant.

An officer (elder or deacon) may also be removed from office if all the elders (other than the elder whose call to office is being challenged) agree to remove him from office. Again, he may appeal as described above.

The session should always notify the congregation of changes in the status of an officer, as soon as reasonably possible.

LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS

The Covenantal Form of Worship: The Divine Service

The Lord's Day (Sunday) worship service at Christ Church follows the Bible's covenant renewal pattern of Calling, Confession/Cleansing, Consecration, Communion, and Commissioning. Every worship service should include a call to worship; singing to God; confession of sin and declaration of forgiveness; calling upon God's name in prayer; reading and exposition of the Word; the collection of tithes and offerings; confession of our common faith; celebration of the Eucharistic feast with bread and wine; and a benediction. Everything should be conducted in an orderly and beautiful way, conducive to the edification of the saints and the glory of God.

The session may also schedule other times of worship (including the Eucharist), especially in accord with the historic Christian calendar. While only Lord's Day services are considered "mandatory," members are strongly encouraged to participate in these other worship events, unless providentially hindered. Members are also encouraged to participate in other educational programs, outreach/evangelistic efforts, mission and mercy works, and social events in the life of the Church, as ways of fulfilling their membership vows.

The Nature of Baptism

Baptism is a blessed sacrament of the New Covenant instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of salvation and initiation into his new humanity. The sacramental washing with water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, officially admits a person into the kingdom, temple, and covenant family of God. By the promise of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism becomes an effectual means of salvation to believers. As a means of grace, baptism testifies of their identification with the Triune God of Scripture, union with Christ, regeneration, forgiveness of sin, consecration to walk in newness of life, and fellowship in the Body of Christ (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:11-12; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-5; Tit. 3:5; Mark 1:4). The one baptism of the New Covenant is the fulfillment of the many baptismal events and rituals of the Old Covenant, as well as circumcision, and anointing into office; hence, baptism is not to be repeated.

Baptism, as a public instrument of union with Christ and His people, and as matter of tradition and good order, is ordinarily to be performed in the context of a Lord's Day covenant renewal service, by the pastor, at the beginning of the liturgy. However, baptism's validity is in no way tied to its enactment at a certain time or in a certain place or by a certain person. Especially in cases of extremity or emergency, baptism may be performed outside of a regular worship service and by any baptized person. Ordinary requirements to perform baptism in an orderly fashion may be rescinded because the efficacy of the Sacrament is not absolutely tied to its regular, public administration or to the office or piety of the one who administers; and the blessing of the Sacrament is of more worth than good order in the life of the Church. In cases of emergency baptisms, the session and congregation should be notified of the action as soon as possible.

While symbolic actions surrounding the rite of baptism and drawing attention to its meaning are entirely proper, the baptismal liturgy should be kept relatively simple. Washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit should not be encrusted with additional, extra-biblical rituals that would obscure or subvert the meaning of baptism itself.

Recipients of Baptism

Baptism, as has been nearly universally held in the Church, is appropriately administered to the children of Christians in infancy, since to them, no less than to adults, are the promises of the kingdom. Every covenantal administration in Scripture makes provision for the next generation; the ritual washings and baptismal types of the Old Covenant included children; Jesus declared that even the infants of His people participate in his covenant and kingdom, and are believers; and the Apostles continued the practice of including children by baptizing households and regarding the children of Christians to be “in the Lord.” Thus, Christ and His redemptive benefits belong to disciples of all ages (Acts 2:39; Mt. 18:15-17; Eph. 6:4). That which is signified and conferred in baptism is applicable to infants promised to be in covenant, as well as to adults who profess faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Baptismal candidates, whether children or adults, must ordinarily be approved by the session. Adults should confess their allegiance to Christ prior to baptism. Minor children in the households of Christians should be baptized on the basis of one or more parent's (or guardian's) covenantal membership (Acts 16:31-34) and promise to disciple the child in the home (Gen. 18:19). However, for those who desire to delay the baptism of their children, the session shall defer to the head of each household, in accord with the confessional breadth of the CREC.

When a child is baptized, parents are encouraged, though not required, to make public vows. The congregation makes a vow in response to the baptism, receiving the child into the membership and nurture of the Church in the name of Christ. The parental vows are edifying, as a way of professing the parents' faith in the covenantal promises, declaring what they hope and expect God to accomplish in the administration of the Sacrament, and demonstrating publicly why their child is a proper candidate for baptism. The vows are a public way of indicating why the child has a right to baptism.

To the parents:

1. Do you bring this child for baptism in faith, trusting in God's covenant promises to be your child's God (Gen. 17:7) and Savior from sin (Acts 16:31; 1 Pt. 3:21), persuaded that God desires to receive your child into his family and flock (Mt. 18:1-14)?
2. Do you bring this child for baptism in faith, trusting God to unite him to Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-14); to clothe him with Christ (Gal. 3:27); to make him a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13); and to make this baptism his entrance into the new creation in Christ Jesus (Tit. 3:5)?
3. Do you promise in faith and in reliance upon the grace of God to disciple this child by teaching him all of Christ's commandments (Mt. 28:18-20); directing him to fear and obey God (Gen. 18:19; Ecc. 12:13) and to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Dt. 6:1-25); and to bring him up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), that he might walk worthy of the calling he has received in the gospel all throughout his life (Eph. 4:1)?

To the congregation:

Do you, the congregation of Christ Church, promise to undertake the responsibility of assisting these parents as they nurture this child in Christian faith and practice to the glory of God?

Members of the congregation act as “godparents” to the baptized child. But parents may choose a specific godparent or godparents, if they so desire. Godparents are special representatives of the church family to the child, with a heightened obligation to oversee and encourage the covenantal nurture of the child. If the parents have chosen godparents, they may take the following vow if desired:

Do you promise to receive this child in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to surround him with Christian love, to pray with and for him, to set before him an example of genuine faith and virtue, to assist his parents in raising him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to care for him in the absence or infidelity of his parents?

The Eucharist (or Lord’s Supper, or Communion)

The Eucharist is a blessed Sacrament of the New Covenant instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of His redemptive work, and as a means of offering and giving Himself and His benefits to His people through the elements of bread and wine. By eating the bread and drinking the cup in a worthy manner, as one family, believers Spiritually feed upon Christ, renew their union and communion with Him, memorialize His death before the Father, and Spiritually commune with other covenant members (Luke 22:20; Mat. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Cor. 10:14-21). The Eucharistic feast is the supreme climax of covenant renewal worship, as we celebrate peace with God and one another. The Lord’s Supper fulfills all the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant.

Recipients of the Eucharist

Christ Church practices a discriminating form of “open communion.” That is, we encourage all baptized Christians (in good standing, not excommunicated) to celebrate the feast of the Eucharist and so commune with Christ in His body. Visiting Christians should abide by the policies of their home Church with regard to participation. In principle, we confess that the Eucharistic table belongs to all of God’s people, and invite all other Christians to join with us in feasting and celebrating the Lord’s presence and gifts in and through bread and wine.

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the Sacraments remains with the session. Baptized children are welcome to partake as soon as they are physically able, if their parents desire. However, for those who differ with this view, the session shall defer to the conviction of the head of each household. See APPENDIX #1 for Christ Church’s policy regarding the admission of children to the Lord’s Supper.

While the Lord’s Supper is ordinarily to be administered in the context of the whole local body on the Lord’s Day, the pastor and/or session may designate other times of celebration as well. The Eucharist may be included in special services, especially those coordinated with this historic Church calendar (e.g., Maundy Thursday). The Eucharist may also be administered by the pastor to the sick and to invalids, who are unable to attend the congregation’s regular assemblies, even if only two or three are present.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Informal and Formal Discipline

One of the marks of a true Church of Jesus Christ is that it maintains discipline. Indeed, a biblical application of discipline is necessary to maintaining the boundary between the Church and the world. The purpose of Church discipline is to prevent, restrain, or even to remove any evil that may threaten the Church; and to promote and encourage that which is good and glorifying to God. Church discipline, in all its forms -- preventative, formative, corrective, and final -- is essential to the ministry and mission of the Church, for without it the saints are not properly edified and protected, and those outside the Church are led to mock the gospel and the hypocrisy of God's people.

All Christ Church members are encouraged to love one another as they love themselves. By God's grace, disciplinary procedures will rarely be necessary, as we seek to live together in a community of rich, deep fellowship and friendship, continually encouraging one another in faithfulness and holiness. We must also remember that our Savior warned against the dangers of judging one another without mercy and called upon us to forgive as we desire to be forgiven.

We must let love cover a multitude of sins. However, love also requires confronting sin at times, and when those occasions arise, it is critical that matters be handled in a peaceful, wise, humble, and gracious manner. Only he who is Spiritual should seek to correct a brother in sin. He should do so in gentleness, knowing that he is capable of falling himself. We must first remove the beams from our own eyes. While this Constitution seeks to provide a set of procedures and guidelines for dealing with disciplinary situations, the chief concern of all involved should never simply be doing things according to the proper form, but acting towards one another in love, in a manner most likely to turn the straying one back to the right path and serve the common good of the church body. God delights more in love among than the brethren and the exercise of mercy than technically correct procedures carried out in a cold hearted fashion. Love includes kindness, forgiveness, patience, and leniency, as well as warning, firm discipline, corrective rebukes, and censures aimed at bringing the straying and lost back to repentance. We desire to be fully biblical in both our procedures and relationships, of course.

The ordinary course of discipline is informal. Members are encouraged to practice self-discipline and self-control, as fruit of the Spirit. Members are urged to overlook the failings of others in love (1 Pt. 4:8), and to stir up other members of the body to charity and good works (Heb. 10:19-25). Most Church discipline should be members lovingly and winsomely holding one another accountable to live according to the rule of Christ. Without becoming busybodies, as Paul warns, members should oversee one another in relationally appropriate ways.

Formal Church discipline is applied through the official action and judgment of the session. All members should be aware that membership in Christ Church makes one a proper object of Church discipline as the Scriptures and membership vows require. Church members are children of the heavenly Father, and sometimes His chastening comes through the instrumentality of the Church (Heb. 12:3-11). Except in cases of scandal requiring immediate action, the pattern of Church discipline will generally include private informal confrontation, private formal admonishment by two or three witnesses (Mt. 18:16), formal public admonishment (Mt. 18:17), and a formal hearing which may result in excommunication (Mt. 18:17). Excommunication should ordinarily be a public act of the Church (1 Cor. 5:4-5). Repentance always terminates the Church discipline process and restores the offender. Public sins may still call for public censure and/or public confession, as the session sees fit, even if the offender is repentant. The session should always prayerfully consider the various ramifications of such censure or confession, aiming at the glory of God and the good of the body as a whole.

While following these general biblical principles, the session shall establish the specific procedures and timelines for all formal discipline on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include a clear and timely warning to the individual that he is in the process of formal discipline, two or three visits or communications involving two or three witnesses, and clear records and/or minutes of the entire proceedings kept by the elders. The session should only move to the next step in the disciplinary process with great care and after much prayer. Occasionally, the gravity and severity of an offense, combined with an open refusal to repent on the part of the offender, may require the session to move immediately towards excommunication without trial or other intervening steps, but generally the offender should be patiently given every opportunity to repent before being cut off. In cases where a member shows contempt for the court of the Church and exhibits contumacy by refusing to cooperate with the disciplinary process, the session may erase his name from the membership of the Church with an appropriate degree of censure, including a declaration of excommunication if deemed appropriate.

When the elders determine that a hearing is necessary, they will 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 informing the accused of the specific charges, the time, place, and date of the trial, and ample time for the accused to prepare a defense or to repent.

At the hearing, one of the elders will give a solemn charge from the Scriptures on the responsibilities of those present, the evidence against the accused will be presented, and the accused will have time to make a reasonable defense, including the right to question any witnesses (as the session deems fit).

At a separate, subsequent meeting of the elders, after prayerful consideration, a vote will be taken on each of the charges presented. The elders will declare their verdict to the congregation on an appointed Lord's Day, following an appropriate exhortation (1 Cor. 5:4-5). The elders will remind the congregation to refrain from self-righteous judgments, unloving gossip, and other forms of hurtful speech about the accused. The elders will also instruct the congregation how to best express love to the one who has stood trial. The congregation will be reminded that church discipline aims at the glory of God, the purity of his Church, and the good of the offender. The congregational meeting shall include prayer for the restoration of the excommunicant.

The elders will keep all the records pertaining to the hearing, including all pertinent correspondence, transcripts, and minutes. If he requests it, the accused will be given a copy of these records.

Excommunication will end when in the evaluation of the elders the one under discipline has repented. A confession of this repentance will be read to the congregation on the Lord's Day, and the elders shall joyfully and formally announce the end of the discipline and the restoration of fellowship.

All parties involved in disciplinary cases are reminded to maintain appropriate confidentiality and to uphold the laws of the land, insofar as they do not require us to violate the law of God.

In all matters of discipline, members of Christ Church are urged to remember the purposes of such discipline: the glory of God, whose honor is tarnished when the people who bear His name live scandalously; the restoration of the offender; the prevention of similar falls on the part of other Christians; and the peace and purity of the body of Christ.

Subjects of Discipline

Any communicant member (including those baptized as infants) may be disciplined by the Church. Non-communicant members of member households are subject to pastoral admonishment from the Church. Non-member communicant Christians who attend Church regularly are subject to pastoral admonition, but not to formal excommunication. Nevertheless, an attending non-member who is divisive, heretical, scandalous, or factious may be barred from the Eucharist and rejected after proper admonition. If another Church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to Christ Church desiring to join, then the session will honor the discipline of the other Church, unless after due consultation with the person concerned and after all appropriate information is considered, the session rejects or reverses such disciplinary action as out of accord with the government of Christ and the teaching of the Scriptures.

Appeals

Members of Christ Church may appeal the actions of the session to the presbytery and/or council of the CREC, in accord with any provisions of the CREC Constitution. Or appeals may be brought before an ad hoc court for binding arbitration. The composition of such ad hoc courts should be mature Christian men, agreed upon by both the accused and the accusers, and the specific procedures of arbitration may be established on a case-by-case basis, in accord with the principles of this Constitution and the Scriptures.

Excommunicants, while technically no longer church members, may appeal the decision of the Christ Church session to presbytery, and to council, if they desire.

All parties should agree to abide by decisions rendered by broader courts of the church, even as we acknowledge that such courts are fallible and perfect justice will not be administered until the Lord does so at the final judgment.

Appeals should be made in a timely fashion (normally within 30 days of the verdict being appealed) and the Christ Church session should be notified in writing, along with the presbytery or other relevant courts.

DISSOLUTION

Christ Church, as a local congregation, may be dissolved by the unanimous vote of the session and two-thirds of the congregation. In the event of dissolution, all of the Church's debts shall be fully paid and any remaining assets and holdings designated by the session to other such churches or ministries as are in general agreement with Christ Church's doctrinal outlook.

REVISING AND AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

We recognize that while God has given to His Church through His Word a plan of government, that form does not cover all necessary details. Thus, many aspects of this Constitution do not presume to be biblically mandated, but only consistent with biblical principles, guided by sanctified common sense and a desire to do all things prudently, decently, and in order. Thus, we recognize the limitations of this Constitution and its subordination to the higher standard of Scripture. We also recognize that the practice of Christian faithfulness and charity is the best way to compensate for constitutional and procedural deficiencies. The character of office-holders is vastly more important to the health of the Church than the details of the form of government.

The Constitution of Christ Church may be revised or amended at any time with the consent of a majority of the session and the approval of two-thirds vote at a congregational meeting. Such votes require two weeks notice. The reasons for the proposed changes should be clearly explained to the congregation. The congregation should be given ample time to discuss the issue publicly in a congregational meeting.

The session may supplement or clarify the meaning of the Constitution with appendices whenever needed. The appendices do not have constitutional authority but aid in the interpretation and application of the constitution; in working out constitutionally derived policies to govern the life of the congregation; and in expressing the voice of the session on particular issues.

As we confess that this Constitution is a fallible work of fallible men, it may be set aside without the process of amendment by the judgment of the session, if obedience to Scripture is found to require it. Under such circumstances, the congregation will be informed, and the Constitution amended at the first opportunity.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX #1: Paedocommunion/Credocommunion Cooperative Agreement

1. We believe covenant children are part of the church family and ought to be treated accordingly. We desire to have covenant children present with the gathered community in worship and participate in the service as much as possible (though we understand this cannot always be done). We want to do full justice to Jesus' declaration that covenant children are members of his kingdom and bearers of his name (Mt. 18:1-14; 19:13). We want to receive covenant children into the family of God as fully as possible, giving them needed nurture and care in the covenant community.
2. We recognize that the issue of including baptized children at the Lord's Table is one of great importance and varying conviction in the contemporary Reformed church (including our own congregation). Out of a desire to practice a charitable catholicity, our church welcomes families holding both paedocommunion and credocommunion viewpoints. We recognize that both paedocommunionists and credocommunionists are concerned to be faithful to Scripture and to the church's historic practice (with paedocommunionists pointing to the early centuries of the church, and credocommunionists pointing to the Reformational era). While individual officers are free to take a humble, conscientious stance on the issue as they see fit, *as a session*, we are neutral and inclusive, allowing both practices, as families desire. No one will be ostracized for practicing one view or the other. The session insists on cooperative agreement, even in the midst of possible differences on this issue within our church body.
3. Parents are free to choose according to their own conscience and understanding whether or not they would like to bring their child to the table on the basis of baptism (as soon as the child can ingest the bread and wine), or on the basis of a profession of faith (evaluated in a age appropriate way by the elders, when the parents request an interview). Parents may simply notify elders of their convictions at the time of their child's baptism, or when they join the church, and the session will make a note of it. Elders will be happy to serve as advisors if parents wish to have additional pastoral input in making a decision about bringing their child to the table.
4. Whatever practice parents decide upon, they are encouraged to raise their children up in the fear and admonition of the Lord. Those who practice credocommunion should not wait until their children are old enough to make a verbal profession to begin training their children in the faith. Even before children can talk, they can be positively shaped in all kinds of ways. Likewise, those who adopt a paedocommunion observance should not presume upon God's grace, but diligently instruct their children. They should not assume that because their children are already at the table that there is no need for them to be vigilant in the Spiritual formation of the children. Paedocommunionists need to be reminded that their children need to be nurtured in other ways if they are to receive the blessings of the Lord's Table with a growing faith.
5. In sanctioning the practice of paedocommunion to families with paedocommunionist convictions, the elders are *not* sanctioning force feeding infants before they are physically ready to ingest the elements. Nor are elders handing over the keys of the kingdom to parents. The elders will still supervise admission to and exclusion from the table. Once a child has been admitted to the table (by baptism or by profession), only a process of discipline by the elders can remove that person from table fellowship (cf. Mt. 18:15-20). (Of course, we do not envision ever having to bring formal charges against a young child! Rather, the point is that parents may not excommunicate their children on their own as a means of discipline since the table is under the oversight of the session, not fathers. Fathers hold the rod of correction, not the keys to the kingdom. We also expect our children to grow up to be faithful Christians, but if a child of the covenant did happen to grow up and reject the faith of his youth, he would be subject to church sanctions.)

6. The elders urge the members of Christ Church to discuss the issue of paedocommunion-vs.-credo-communion charitably and peaceably, without arrogance or self-righteousness. This is an issue over which faithful, thoughtful Christians have disagreed. We will *not* allow varying convictions or practices to divide our body (cf. 1 Cor. 11:17ff). We will strive for like-mindedness on this issue, but will do so in a spirit of humility, prayerfulness, study, and winsomeness. Even if one particular view is taught from the pulpit or Sunday school lectern, those who hold a different view should not feel attacked or ostracized. The truths we hold in common vastly outweigh our small differences.

APPENDIX #2: Marriage Definition And Policies

We confess that the church is subject only to Christ. God alone is lord of the conscience (WCF 20). While church members ought to obey civil rulers in temporal things, provided they are not required by those authorities to sin (Mk. 12:13-17; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pt. 2:13-17), the church has a divine right to embody her beliefs in her practices and to carry out the mission Christ has entrusted to her without interference or hindrance. The church as an institution shall remain free from state control in faith, doctrine, and practice, and her members should not be forced to act contrary to their consciences, as informed by the Word of God. We gladly render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but under no circumstances will we render to Caesar that which belongs only to God. With these truths in view, we declare the church's right to reject any attempts on the part of the state to impose on the church or her members unbiblical definitions of marriage.

Marriage as a covenant bond between a man and a woman is an institution founded not in cultural convention or convenience, but in God's act of creation (Gen. 2:23-24). Marriage is God's ordinance, a holy mystery instituted for his glory and our good. It is our desire to honor the marriage bed and keep it undefiled (Heb. 13:4). Sex outside of marriage, sex with someone other than one's spouse, divorce without biblical grounds, and the taking of more than one spouse, are all among the many ways in which God's institution of marriage has been dishonored. We believe the union between husband and wife in heart, body, and mind to be a sacred bond, intended by God for their mutual joy and companionship; for the help and comfort given one another in times of prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. We believe man and woman to be equal in creation and redemption, equal in worth and dignity; and yet the sexes are different from one another and thus complementary in their roles in church, society, and family. God has ordained the covenant of marriage so that husband and wife would together symbolize the relationship of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21ff); he has designed loving and faithful marriages to be the best possible context in which children, as the fruit of their parents' mutual love, can be raised to healthy maturity; and he has called husband and wife to help one another in the pursuit of a common salvation and service to the common good of humanity. Because of the nature of the marriage relation, a believer ought to marry in the Lord (1 Cor. 7:39).

We believe the preservation of biblical marriage to be essential to the well-being and health not only of the church but of civil society. Following the Scriptures and the historic Christian tradition, we define marriage as a covenant freely and lawfully entered into by a man and a woman, sealed by sexual relations (WCF 24). This covenant is to be a lifelong commitment until husband and wife are parted by death. The covenant of marriage can be broken by infidelity (Matt. 19:1-10) or desertion (which includes not only abandonment but severe forms of abuse; cf. 1 Cor. 7:10-16). If at all possible, broken marriage covenants should be repaired through repentance and forgiveness, though we recognize there are situations where such full restoration will be impossible or unwise. The session of Christ Church is responsible to determine for her members if there are biblical grounds for divorce in any given case.

We believe the covenant of marriage between a man and woman to be the only relationship in which God's gift of sex can be lawfully enjoyed (Prov. 5:15-23). Sex with anyone other than one's spouse is contrary to God's design for human flourishing. The covenant bond of marriage protects the precious treasure of sexuality. Misuses of God's beautiful gift of sexuality through fornication, premarital cohabitation, adultery, pornography, etc., lead to the dehumanizing of self and the exploitation of others, contrary to the law of love. We are urged in Scripture to make a covenant with our eyes to not look lustfully on another (Job 31:1; Matt. 5:27-30), to abstain from sexual immorality that we may possess our bodies in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:1-8), and to not present our members as instruments of sin but to present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:1-14).

We resist all attempts to redefine marriage to include same sex partnerships. We can never regard a same sex relationship of any kind as a marriage, no matter what civil society might say about it. Homosexual relations

are unlawful and contrary to our God-designed natures as men and women (Rom. 1:18-32). While humanity's fall into sin has disordered our desires, including our sexual desires, God's original design in the creation of man and woman remains normative (Gen. 1-2; Matt. 19:1-10). Certainly, we desire to bless, serve, and love persons with homosexual desires. We know we are fellow image bearers and fellow sinners along with them, and we long to show them the compassion of Christ. But we cannot countenance the fulfillment of their desires under any circumstances. Rather, we call on persons with such desires to join us in trusting the Lord Jesus to forgive our sin through his shed blood and transform us by his healing grace (though we also fully recognize that living as faithful disciples of Jesus is always a struggle and all of us fall short of the goal in this life).

In light of these principles, the session of Christ Church adopts the following policy: *Our church building and property are not to be used to host any ceremonies inconsistent with the biblical teaching on marriage, nor is our pastoral staff to be involved with such ceremonies.* For example, this means a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is not to be conducted on Christ Church grounds. Neither is an unlawfully divorced person with outstanding obligations to their former spouse to be married on our property. Likewise, this policy means any kind of ceremony between a same sex couple is not to be performed on Christ Church grounds. Further, the session forbids Christ Church ministers from conducting or participating in any such services. May God help us as we confess and defend the teaching of his Word concerning the institution of marriage.

APPENDIX #3 Conducting Business Via Electronic Means

The Christ Church session and diaconate may conduct business via email, video/conference call and other electronic means, provided there is ample opportunity for communication among all participating members, equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. When business is done via email, passed motions should be incorporated into the minutes of the next stated, in-person meeting.

BOOK OF CONFESSIONS

On Creeds and Confessions

The “Book of Confessions” is part of our Constitution, confessing what we believe the Scriptures to teach. It is our desire to contend earnestly for this faith, standing against all corruptions and distortions of the biblical gospel, and standing on the shoulders of our ancestors in the faith. It is also our desire to use these confessions as a platform from which we can proclaim the whole counsel of God and build unity with Christians in a variety of other denominations and traditions. Finally, this Book of Confessions declares to the world what we believe, as a Christian Church, and thus serves to undergird our mission to the lost.

In this Book, we define and position ourselves as a “Reformed catholic” congregation – upholding the distinctives of the Reformation while seeking unity with all Christians who fall within the parameters of the ecumenical creeds of antiquity. We lament many of the divisions within Christendom and find them unnecessary to sustain. We hope to use this Book to begin the project of restoring the visible unity of the Church.

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 extra-biblical, uninspired creeds, confessions, and catechisms. *Creed* is a term from the Latin, *credo*, “I believe.” *Confession* is based on the Greek, *homologeo*, “I confess.” The term *catechism* is also from a Greek word, *katacheo*, “to answer, to echo.” In these documents, God’s people seek to replicate God’s revealed truth in their own words.

In the grand expanse of the church’s history, the affirmations of our faith have been as simple as “Jesus is Lord” (Acts 10:36, 1 Cor. 12:3, Phil. 2:11), in the face of those who would require the confession, “Caesar is Lord;” they have been as detailed, technical, and complex as the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, with their unparalleled exhaustiveness, summarizing and crystallizing the insights of the Reformation with the utmost precision; and they have been as warm, beautiful, and pastoral as the Apostle’s Creed and the Heidelberg Catechism.

A strong biblical basis may be given for creedal statements and confessions of faith. Such declarations of faith function to summarize biblical truths (1 Tim. 3:16) and to enable us to “hold fast to the pattern of sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13). They are traditionally used as a means of confessing a person’s faith in the gospel in a formal way at baptism, ordination, and similar times of ecclesiastical and Spiritual significance (1 Tim. 4:14, 6:12; Acts 8:12). Creeds and confessions have been used to publicly express the true faith of the Church, especially in gathered worship, as we seek to follow and hold fast to Christ (Heb. 4:14, 10:23, 13:15), in the face of false religions and philosophies (Col. 2:8-10). The catechetical (questions and answer) method of oral instruction was used by Jews in providing instruction in the Law (Rom. 2:18; cf. Ex. 12:26-27; Deut. 6). Likewise, the New Covenant Church has often taught in this way, with a view toward achieving fuller understanding of God’s Word in Christ.

The doctrinal symbols included in our Book of Confessions are not the only way to summarize God’s truth, but they are faithful to the system of doctrine contained in the Scriptures. As such, they function in our congregation to test the soundness of our teaching; they serve as useful pedagogical tools in forming children and new converts in the faith, as well as edifying and maturing the rest of the brethren; and they act to inspire us towards an ever stronger grasp of our faith in historically and theologically informed language, so that we can be conversant in the speech of Christendom. We do not view any of these confessions as the “last word,” as though the Church had nothing more to learn, and no future confessions to write. We look forward to seeing God continue to mature His Church’s grasp of the truth, so that she learns to “tell the grand story” in ever more faithful, precise, and powerful ways.

The Proper Use and the Abuse of Creeds and Confessions

We wish to qualify our use of extra-biblical confessional documents. There are two extremes to evade. On the one hand the Church must avoid an anti-creedal spirit which tends to be ignorant of and ungrateful for the Church's history of defending the truth by the use of creeds. Throughout the history of the Church many have claimed to submit to the "literal" words of the Bible, while they were yet unable to submit to a statement of faith that accurately reflects the doctrine clearly taught in the written Word of God. Heretics have often cloaked their falsehoods in the language of Scripture, and confessional statements have proved useful in exposing them. Creeds and confessions are a way for the Church to put God's truth in her own words. They are valuable apologetic tools.

This anti-creedal spirit turns out to be prideful as well. This is evident when one arrogantly stands on his own, and reads Scripture independently of the Church's teachers from past ages. When we disregard the teaching gifts God has bestowed upon the Church through the centuries, we inevitably fall into error. We should not pretend as though we were first to read the Bible, or that we could read the Bible in a presuppositional vacuum, or that we could interpret the Scriptures apart from consultation with the Church's tradition. Private judgment must be protected within certain bounds, but the Bible was never intended to function apart from the tradition and communal life of the Church body.

On the other hand, the Church must avoid an overly strict, overly scrupulous use of creeds and confessions. This stance has a practical tendency of functionally setting the confessional documents in the place of the Scriptures, even if it denies doing so. Such an approach sadly locks the Church into a past era; by essentially putting the man-made confessions on par with the Word of God, it closes off any new light the Spirit may be seeking to break forth from the Scriptures. This overly rigid use of confessions actually impedes diligent study of the Word and the Church's doctrinal maturation (Eph. 4:11-16). It makes it difficult for the Church to apply the Word to changing cultural situations, hinders the Church's missional efforts, and inevitably leads to infighting among Christians. Confessional subscription should not blind us to the fact that God's truth is so rich, it can be stated in a variety of formulations. Further, no man-made confession can comprehensively reproduce God's system of truth since we are both finite and fallible. At best, we hope for our confessions to approximate the system of Scripture. We believe the church's confessional diversity can actually be used as a great strength, provided we focus on the truths the confessions share, and avoid over-emphasizing distinctives.

We confess that none of the confessions can be *absolutely* identified with Scripture and none represent God's final word to the Church. We still have more to learn – and Christ Church looks forward to the day when God's people are unified and mature enough to once again undertake the task of writing confessional summaries of Scripture, as a way of confessing our faith before God and the world, and drawing Christians together around all that we hold in common, so that we can get on with the mission of the Church, the discipling of the nations under Christ.

Our Subscription Policy

The Westminster Standards (as defined below) serve as the doctrinal standards for officers of Christ Church, in subordination to Scripture. While Scripture serves as the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the standards are regarded as a fallible but useful summation of biblical truth. What do our officers bind themselves to when they take their vows, subscribing to the Westminster Standards? We believe in honest subscription and encourage all officer candidates to be scrupulous in stating their exceptions to the court examining them. The court must wisely and graciously determine if those stated exceptions disqualify a man from serving as a Christ Church officer, though the court should keep in mind that there are theological truths and formulations over which men of good faith and mature character may differ without deviating from the overarching system of truth as set forth in the confession. We should all forbear patiently with one another even as we strive for like-mindedness, keeping in mind the weakness of human understanding and the fact that many minor errors can be tolerated within the life of the church with only minimal injury because they do not strike at the vitals of true religion. The standards must be understood in their historical context (that is, generic Calvinism), and within the overarching stream of the historic Christian church (namely, Nicene orthodoxy); the language of the Standards is not clay, to be molded into whatever meaning the officer candidate sees fit. Subscription to the standards does not mean that the standards necessarily formulate the doctrine in the best manner, or that they provide exhaustive statements of the doctrines confessed, or that they address every teaching of Scripture or condemn every error. Furthermore, subscription does not mean that officers are bound to the Scripture references and allusions and particular expressions found in the standards, nor are they bound to the incidental remarks or the theological deductions which some may draw from the doctrines set forth in the confessions. Rather, subscription simply means that the doctrines in the standards are to be embraced because they are derived from the Holy Scriptures. We expect all Christ Church officers to be men of integrity, and thus expect them to uphold the doctrines they have vowed to believe and practice as summarized in the standards. When officers take their vows, they are making a good confession in the presence of many witnesses and committing themselves to fight the good fight of faith. The vows bind the man to hold to the standards as a faithful interpretation of the Word of God (apart from declared exceptions) and to embody its truth in his life.

Our Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms

Christ Church accepts the following list of creeds, confessions, and catechisms as, in general, representing and summarizing our own doctrinal commitments. We take these documents as historic, authentic, and reliable summaries of what Scripture teaches. While not necessarily absolutely consistent with one another (the way the canonical Scriptures are), there is more than enough family resemblance between these documents that can they function together in the life of the church. (The texts of these documents, being commonly available, are not included here.)

The Ecumenical Creeds

The ecumenical creeds of the early Church have always served as the doctrinal boundaries of orthodoxy. They have stood the test of time, and undergird all our doctrinal commitments. Thus, these are the most authoritative and un-revisable of all ecclesiastical documents (though admittedly the Synod of Orange does not carry the weight of the others in terms of ecumenical acceptance). These ancient documents should be the touchstone of true faith, in propositional form, and the basis of healing the fractures that afflict the catholic Church in our time. John Calvin organized the four books of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* around the basic Christian dogma of the Apostles Creed, and the Westminster divines rightly called the Apostles Creed the sum of saving truth. The Nicene Creed has the broadest acceptance of any official statement of faith produced by a church council. The Te Deum is more of a liturgical than creedal document, but represents one of the pillars of the church's teaching as well. Martin Luther said the Te Deum deserved to be ranked with

the Nicene Creed and Athanasian Creed as one the three central symbols of the Christian faith. These ancient creedal formulas represent the widest Christian consensus possible, the form of doctrine that has been believed by God's new covenant people in all times and places. As true Reformed catholics, we embrace the faith of our fathers whole heartedly and without reservation.

The Apostles' Creed (ca. 200)

The Athanasian Creed (ca. 361)

The Nicene Creed (325; revised, 381)

Definition of Chalcedon (451)

The Te Deum (ca. 500)

Synod of Orange (529)

The Reformational Confessions and Catechisms

The Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation era represent a quantum leap forward in the Church's understanding of Scripture in both breadth and depth. They crystallize what it means to be a "protesting catholic." While the documents vary from one another in details, they stand together in affirming the gospel of God's sovereign grace in Christ. The Westminster Standards, probably the most widely recognized summary of Reformed doctrine, serves as our primary confession of faith (as explained below). The other documents are valuable summaries of the Protestant faith as well, and are useful for teaching doctrine to adults and children alike.

Martin Luther's Small Catechism (1529)

Martin Luther's Large Catechism (1529)

The Augsburg Confession (1530, revised 1540)

John Calvin's Genevan Catechism (1536, revised 1541 and 1546)

John Calvin's Instruction in Doctrine for Young Children (1538-39)

The French Confession (1559)

The Scots Confession (1560)

The Second Helvetic Confession (1562)

The Thirty Nine Articles (1562)

The Irish Articles (1615)

The Three Forms of Unity (including The Belgic Confession [1561], The Heidelberg Catechism [1563], The Canons of Dort [1619])

The Westminster Standards (including the Confession of Faith and [1646] the Shorter and Larger Catechisms [1647]; American revision [1789])

Modern Statements of Faith

More contemporary evangelical statements reiterate Reformed truth to address new historical situations and controversies, and further develop Reformed doctrine. These statements are the least authoritative because they are not time tested and have not necessarily won the breadth of acceptance as the other documents. But they are still useful for a variety of purposes.

Barmen Declaration (1934)

The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy: Summary and Affirmations (1978)

Our World Belongs to God (1987)

I Belong To God: A Covenantal Catechism (2002)

The Function of These Documents

Our Book of Confessions is not intended to be totally comprehensive. That is to say, there are certainly other creeds and confessions worthy of inclusion that have been left out. But our collection is sufficient to connect us with all the major branches of the Church, past and present. These documents show our desire to be rooted in tradition as way of respecting the work and heritage of the Holy Spirit in previous generations, but also to manifest our desire for a genuine ecclesial unity based on truth in the present.

By adopting a variety of confessional statements, it is not our desire to create a confused cacophony. Rather, we believe that this procedure respects the breadth of the Spirit's work in the Church over the last two thousand years. The ecumenical creeds are foundational to everything else, but the later developments in doctrine cannot be safely ignored. While the Church has fragmented, the Spirit has continued to work in her various segments; and insofar as these documents represent the fruit of the Spirit's work, they should be compatible with one another, even if they employ various vocabularies and have different emphases. Just as we confess our sector of the Church is not to be identified with the catholic Church, neither can we identify any one denomination's confession as the sole standard of truth. We may differ in some convictions, but that should not overshadow vast areas of agreement.

With regard to confessions of the early Protestant period, while there is some variation, we see a basic family resemblance between these different symbols, such that they are generally compatible with one another. For example, John Calvin was able to sign the Augsburg Confession, which is now known as a distinctively Lutheran document. The Dutch and British strands of Reformational Christianity use different confessions, reflecting different times, places, and cultures, but they are generally identical in substance. Taken together, the Reformed confessions represent what is commonly known as "the Reformed faith" in all its fullness. And yet not even these glorious statements of truth can be absolutized; the Reformed Church must be ever reforming.

But the Church can never move forward without simultaneously looking backward. In this body of creeds and confessions, we show substantial doctrinal unity with all faithful Protestants, and in respect to *basic* doctrines, even Romanist, and Eastern communions (while still desiring to bear witness against their serious errors from which we have justly separated). The classic confessional and catechetical documents of Martin Luther, John Calvin, Philip Melanchthon, and John Knox keep us firmly in touch with our Protestant roots. At their best, the magisterial Reformers articulated a true "Reformed catholicity," which we hope to uphold and emulate. The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, produced by English Protestants, contain an expression of the faith which crystallizes the best of the early English Reformation. Moreover, the sacramental doctrine and worship articulated there (and in the various editions of the Book of Common Prayer, stemming from the same Anglican tradition) helpfully connects us to early Protestant worship, which is quite harmonious with the

liturgical patterns and forms of Christ Church. The Irish Confession was an important stepping stone in the formation of the Westminster Standards. By including The Three Forms of Unity, we show our high appraisal of the Continental Reformed tradition and our desire for unity with those who stand in that venerable line of doctrinal formation today. We especially encourage parents in our congregation to utilize the Heidelberg Catechism as a tool for teaching their children the Reformed faith with biblical clarity and personal warmth.

Moving to more recent documents, we have included the Barmen Declaration, a manifesto of evangelical Christians in Germany against the evils of statism (in this case, Nazism). While Barmen is not comprehensive, it does herald the centrality of Christ and His Church in the divine plan of salvation. Whatever its defects, it bore witness to the gospel in troubling times. The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy's Summary and Affirmations set forth the definitive evangelical view of the Bible's trustworthiness and authority. This work of conservative evangelical Church scholars was the product of decades of struggle between faithful believers and compromised liberals and modernists. By including this document, we reinforce our confession of a high view of Scripture and acknowledge our ongoing responsibility to defend the Bible's absolute perfection and authority in the face of contemporary challenges. The declaration, Our World Belongs to God, is a crisp and intelligible statement of the Reformed faith. While it emerges from a denominational context badly compromised with liberalism (the Christian Reformed Church), it is nevertheless generally a very helpful statement, not only summarizing the biblical narrative, but also attempting to sketch out a biblical view of family, work, and politics (albeit, tinged with "political correctness" at points). By including it, we hope to reach out to Reformed Christians in bodies which have departed from their historic roots and have been swayed too much by the currents and trends of the day. We hope to recall these brethren to more faithful Church practice. Finally, we have included a pastoral catechism especially designed for training children in their covenantal privileges and obligations as baptized members of the people of God. The catechism's preface explains its origin, intended usage, and provisional status.

We believe that all the Reformed confessions and catechisms each have their own strengths and weaknesses, so that by including them all, we are sure to be able to avail ourselves of the Reformed tradition at its best. We think that by putting the various traditions and historical periods represented by our Book of Confessions into conversation with one another, our overall understanding of biblical truth can be strengthened and enriched. We do not want to fall into an overly narrow, sectarian approach to the faith, which would leave us talking to no one but ourselves. We recognize that while the Reformed tradition is the purest and most developed doctrinal tradition within Christendom, we have much to learn from interaction with brethren outside the Reformed tradition, both from the past and from the contemporary Church. We also recognize that the Reformed tradition itself has quite a bit of diversity and that by appreciating and interacting with that diversity, we can strengthen our understanding of what the Reformers stood for, and thus better take our stand with them. The Book of Confessions helps us to practice our motto: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity."

Our Confession of Faith: The Westminster Standards

We believe that the Westminster Standards (1646-7) are among the clearest and most definitive statements of biblical doctrine yet produced by the Church. As a Church in the Presbyterian tradition, we have committed to using the Westminster Confession and Catechisms as our basic doctrinal standards for officers. Christ Church members do not have to subscribe to the Standards; the membership vows (or the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed) are sufficient to constitute a profession of orthodox faith.

However, as a Reformed Church, our officers are expected to subscribe to a Reformed confession. Thus, candidates for office at Christ Church should make a detailed study of the Westminster Standards. When candidates are entered into office at Christ Church, they must state exceptions to the Westminster Standards to a Church court for evaluation. (They do not have to cite exceptions to other documents in the Book of Confessions, though those documents may be consulted and cited as the officer candidate undergoes examination.)

The Church court examining the candidate will determine if the exceptions are acceptable. Exceptions to the Westminster Standards already incorporated into the Christ Church Constitution (e.g., paedocommunion) have already been judged as acceptable implicitly and do not need to be examined, though the candidate should state them. All cases of doctrinal dispute with an officer should be tried against the Westminster Standards (in subordination to Scripture), taking into account the officer's approved exceptions.

Our Hope

Even though these creeds and confessions carry a measure of authority and have an important role to play, we resist idolizing them or resting in them. We do not use creeds and confessions as a way of trusting in our own wisdom and understanding, or as a way of creating a “theological legalism,” in which we save ourselves by figuring out right theology. Rather, we see the creeds and confessions as God’s gift to the Church. The creeds are wonderful tools for pastoral and missional work and should inform every aspect of Church life. They are helpful in defending the faith against unbelievers as well as in training and catechizing believers. But we also see them as the fallible work of uninspired men. They are always subordinate to the Bible. Our ultimate hope is not having a perfect creedal statement; rather our hope is in the grace of God, manifested to us in the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the gift of His Holy Spirit, who promises to lead us into all truth and into life everlasting.