

# Proposed Constitution

Of the Mid-Ohio Valley Reformed Fellowship  
Version 0.1 – September 29, 2009

## ***Declaration of Jurisdictions***

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. Therefore go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the world. Amen” (Matthew 28:18-20).

1.1 Christ’s authority and jurisdiction, like His Person, issues from the trinitarian Godhead. Christ’s authority and jurisdiction is universal or one, yet diverse or three, and manifests in four universal cultural institutions, one of which is private and three of which are corporate. The diverse characteristics of Christ’s authority and jurisdiction(s) are interpenetrating and overlapping, and yet issue in distinct applications that are both spiritual and legal, particular and corporate.

1.2 We recognize the cultural institution of private, individual, spiritual freedom (identified in the Westminster Confession Chapter 20: Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty Of Conscience [Savoy Declaration Chapter 21]), which issues from Christ alone as a function of His Headship.

1.3 We recognize that the hierarchical structure of the Godhead provides an image or model for the corporate structure of the cultural institutions that issue from Christ, and that this hierarchical structure does not negate or damage the authority or jurisdiction of the Trinity or the cultural institutions pertaining thereunto. Those cultural institutions are: household government, church government and civil government, each of which exercises a form of hierarchical, representative government (the head of household represents the household, the elders represent the church and elected officials (*deacons* according to Romans 13) represent various civil bodies).

1.4 All cultural institutions are governed according to Scripture, which separates the jurisdictions in order to balance power, thwart the sin of usurpation and provide for the freest possible expression and diversity of human character possible under the Lordship of Christ in order to facilitate the division of labor, the engine of sanctification (or personal and corporate maturity in Christ).

1.5 This document pertains to the jurisdiction of the church, which is both universal and particular. Individuals are made members of the universal church by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone, the public symbols of which are baptism and communion. These are the keys of the kingdom (or church) of God, and belong to the jurisdiction of particular churches, and the exercise thereof are universally (or publicly) recognized, fully transferable between particular churches, and once engaged cannot be rescinded because God’s kingdom is eternal.

## ***Preamble***

1.1 In submission to Scripture through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit through regeneration, we confess the purpose of this church is to glorify God in Christ through biblical Christian worship, administration of the sacraments, proclaiming Christ to sinners, edification of the saints through preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God, and the practice of biblical Christian love and charity.

1.2 This church declares itself to be in union with Jesus Christ and through Christ with all of Christ’s body as described in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12-15. This church also declares itself to be a family integrated, interdependent Christian church.

1.3 We confess and believe together with our predecessors in the Christian faith and the saints throughout the world

that in Christ we are brought into a common covenant with God through Christ. We are baptized into that covenant, and become members of Christ's body, the universal Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we celebrate that common covenant by receiving the Lord's Supper. We proclaim ourselves to be united with all who are united in the classic creeds and confessions of the universal Christian church—one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

1.4 All elders, teachers, authorities and officers of this church study, believe and promote these creeds and confessions, holding them to be a unified and faithful witness to what the Scriptures teach, and as a means of identifying with the whole Church.

1.5 Only the sixty-six (66) books of the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are the true, God-breathed, and the authoritative word to humanity regarding all things necessary to know and believe in order to please God. Scripture is our first and final resource for faith and life.

1.6 We do not believe that the civil government of any country, though a minister of God for good and with the authority to enforce civil justice and whose civil laws should reflect the moral law of God, is in any way to interfere with or dictate the beliefs and practices of this or any Christian church, especially when to obey the civil authority would be to disobey the Scriptures.

1.6.1. Consequently, we reject the 501(c)(3) tax classification as an intrusion by the civil government into the church, and protest but graciously donate to the taxing entities amounts equal to their computation of taxes owed until this matter is resolved by all parties involved. (Study reference: [www.hushmoney.com](http://www.hushmoney.com))

## **Secondary Authorities**

- a) We stand in faithful agreement with our fathers in the faith who have affirmed and proclaimed the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon to be faithful to Scripture.
- b) We include as sister authorities the the Athanasian Creed, Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms and Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the Cambridge Platform (1648), the Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (1978). We also view as sister documents the three-forms of unity used historically by the Dutch churches: the Belgic Confession (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and the Canons of Dort (1619). Where these documents may conflict, we turn to Scripture in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit for adjudication, trusting in the Trinitarian God of Scripture to be both just and merciful.
- c) Because the human mind is frail and all true Christians are still sinners even though justified before God, we do not enforce slavish devotion to any of these creeds or Secondary Authorities because we find a wideness (or range of toleration) in God's mercy. The Bible is our first and final rule of faith and practice. We do intend, however, 1) that this church be assisted by these secondary authorities' understanding of Scripture, 2) that this Constitution is to be understood in light of them, and 3) that they are to be consulted as providing additional interpretive basis of this Constitution.

## **Article 1: Sacraments**

### **Baptism**

In conformity with all historic, trinitarian, Christian churches baptism is an institution of church government. Baptism provides an outward or public mark of personal membership in Christ's covenant, and the church universal (invisible, triumphant, and/or eschatological).

Administration of baptism belongs to the local church, and is to be universally recognized and accepted when performed in the name of the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit by the power and presence of Jesus Christ. Local churches shall keep a record of all baptisms. Candidates for baptism will, in consultation with their head of household and the elders of this church, choose one of two baptismal tracts:

<p><b>INFANT BAPTISM TRACK</b>  Symbolizes God's initiating action in salvation and is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.  <i>Westminster Confession, Article 28 (Savoy, 29)</i></p>	<p><b>BELIEVER'S BAPTISM TRACK</b>  Symbolizes believer's response to God's salvation and is accomplished by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God..  <i>Baptist Confession 1689, Article 29.</i></p>
<p><b>1. Infant baptism ceremony</b>  (a symbol of God's grace)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be baptized as a symbol of God's Covenant is to be brought under the influence of God's eternal covenant with all its attendant promises and threatenings (Deuteronomy 28, 2 Samuel 7, Jeremiah 31:31-40, Matthew 26:26-30, Acts 3:12-26) by the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in the hope of salvation, symbolized by the washing of water by sprinkling or pouring, and the parents' commitment to God's covenant.</li> </ul>	<p><b>1. Infant dedication ceremony</b>  (a symbol of God's grace)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be dedicated as a symbol of God's Covenant is to be brought under the influence of God's eternal covenant with all its attendant promises and threatenings (Deuteronomy 28, 2 Samuel 7, Jeremiah 31:31-40, Matthew 26:26-30, Acts 3:12-26) by the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit in the hope of salvation, symbolized by the laying on of hands upon the infant and the parents' commitment to God's covenant.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Profession or Confirmation of Faith</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public confession of faith in Christ as personal Lord and Savior, and a period or process of instruction or testing.</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. Profession or Confirmation of Faith</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public confession of faith in Christ as personal Lord and Savior, and a period or process of instruction or testing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Dedication ceremony</b> (taking the vows of faithfulness).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedication is a symbol of personal regeneration that involves the laying on of hands as an outward sign of an inward and spiritual receiving or the acceptance and forgiveness of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior (Acts 9:17).</li> </ul>	<p><b>3. Baptism ceremony</b> (taking the vows of faithfulness).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be baptized as a symbol of personal regeneration involves sprinkling, pouring or immersion with water of an individual as an outward sign of an inward spiritual grace, or the acceptance and forgiveness of Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior (Romans 6).</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Church Membership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires baptism and profession.</li> <li>Public assent to God's personal calling to unity in the Body of Christ through the common commitment of believers in a local church.</li> <li>Requires public assent to the local church constitution, by-laws, and Statement of Faith.</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. Church Membership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Requires profession and baptism.</li> <li>Public assent to God's personal calling to unity in the Body of Christ through the common commitment of believers in a local church.</li> <li>Requires public assent to the local church constitution, by-laws, and Statement of Faith.</li> </ul>

**Lord's Supper**

In conformity with all historic, trinitarian, Christian churches baptism is the only requirement for reception of the Lord's Supper because the Lord's Supper is the celebration and renewal of Christ's covenant, personal and corporate and is an institution of church government.

**Article 2: Members and Electors**

**A. Members**

The procedures of membership outlined below are designed solely for the purpose of maintaining scriptural and accountable local church government (Heb. 13:17), such that our affairs are conducted decency and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). In no way is our practice of membership to be construed in such a way as to disrupt our Christian unity and fellowship with true saints who are members of other Christian churches (Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 3:1-4).

## **B. Household Membership**

1. Membership in the community of our church will be normally reckoned by household. A household will be eligible when the head of that household meets the following criteria. He or she:

- a. Has been lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) and professes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9-10);
- b. Does not contradict his or her baptism and profession through his or her manner of life (Matt. 7:22-23);
- c. Considers his or her permanent residence to be in our geographical region (Eph. 1:1);
- d. Submits to the government of this church (Philemon 2; Heb. 13:7,17).

2. The elders in Session may admit eligible households into membership in based upon the positive testimony of two or more elders who have personally spoken with the head of the household or the individual(s) seeking membership, and who have heard their profession of faith and ascertained that they have been lawfully baptized.

3. Those seeking membership who make a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but who have not been baptized in a Christian church may be considered for membership after being baptized. Letters of transfer from another Christian church will be accepted, but will not mitigate the above requirements.

4. All membership in the congregational covenant will be by household, meaning that all members of a household that are not explicitly excluded are included as individuals in covenant with the congregation. Non-baptized individuals of member households are not included as individuals in covenant with the congregation. When a member becomes a head of household through marriage or change of residence, the new household will be considered a member household.

5. The elders will maintain a membership list, with the members of each household listed in a clear manner, including names, dates of birth and baptism. This membership list will be maintained by the elders and updated annually, and is not to be confused with the church directory of addresses and phone numbers.

6. Individuals who satisfy the criteria listed above will be received as a member household with a single member in the following circumstances:

- a. He or she has no immediate family;
- b. Members of his or her family choose to join another church;
- c. Members of his or her family are non-believers.

7. If through marriage or adoption the individual joins another household that is not a member household, his or her church membership must be transferred.

8. Unmarried members who are independent of their parents may request to form their own household (e.g., a young man who becomes self-supporting and lives apart from his parents). The elders will review such requests on a case by case basis.

9. Water baptism is required prior to membership. No one will be admitted into membership until baptized. When baptisms are administered by the elders of our church, the mode normally used will be pouring or sprinkling.

10. When a baptized believer comes to our church for membership, the elders shall inquire into his or her baptism

prior to membership in the church.

11. If the baptism was administered by a non-Christian sect or cult, and the baptism is determined to be no baptism at all, the individual will be instructed on his responsibility to be baptized at the first opportunity. As an act of a church government, a valid baptism does not depend upon the personal integrity of the minister conducting the baptism, or the doctrinal and moral integrity of the administering church. Nevertheless, if the corruptions are such as to require our elders to consider that church to be no Christian church at all, then the baptisms administered by such a church will not be received. Given the complexity of all such issues, the elders will deal with each situation on a case-by-case basis.

12. When the criteria listed above have been fulfilled, a household or individual will be formally received into membership before the congregation on the Lord's Day in the following manner.

a. The individual or head of household will be asked the following questions:

1. "Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in need of salvation by Christ, and do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving and resting upon Him alone as He is offered in the gospel?"
2. "Have you been baptized in accordance with His Word?"
3. "Do you swear in the name of God, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to live in a way that becomes followers of Christ?"
4. "Do you swear in the name of God to support the ministry of this church in its worship and work, submitting to its government and discipline, while pursuing its purity and peace?" When the questions are addressed to the head of a household, he or she will also be asked if he or she is speaking on behalf of the household.

b. When an affirmative answer has been given, the members of the congregation will be asked to welcome the individual or household into this covenant relation of membership together with them. They will signify agreement with a corporate "Amen."

c. One of the elders will offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

### **C. Release or Transfer of Membership**

1. If a member household or individual member in good standing requests to be released to the care of another Christian church, the elders will grant the request, and release them with a blessing.

2. If a member household or individual member requests to be released because of disciplinary proceedings against the individual or anyone in the household, the elders will deny the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved.

3. If a member household or individual member is moving from our geographical area, before they leave the elders will exhort them on their duty to find a new church home. If they have not joined themselves to a new church within six months of moving, the elders will release them from membership with a letter of admonition. This will be done even if in the interim a situation arises which would normally call for the disciplinary intervention of the church.

### **D. Access to the Sacraments**

1. It is assumed that all but very young children and unbaptized persons will be regularly attending the Lord's Supper. However, the elders of the church recognize that each head of household received into membership is responsible before God for the spiritual condition of his household. Therefore, considering that conscientious Christians differ as to when it is appropriate to admit children to the Table, the head of household is invited to make recommendations to the elders concerning his or her household, with the understanding that no one will be admitted to the Lord's Supper who has not been baptized. Under the headship of Christ, the administration of church sacraments (or ordinances) remains with the elders. However, in such administration, the elders are to work in league with the

head of the household.

2. When a child in a baptistic home desires to be baptized and come to the Table of the Lord, the parents should notify the elders, who will arrange for the baptism of the child.

3. Any baptized child is invited to partake of the Lord's Supper. The head of the household is responsible to carefully and regularly instruct the child in the gospel and the richness and meaning of the Supper.

## **E. Electors**

Those members who vote in church elections will be called electors.

1. **Qualifications for Electors:** Electors are those who are heads of member households. A household is not eligible to vote in an election unless the household is established before the ballot is distributed to the electors.

2. **Authority of Electors:** Electors may vote in the elections of elders and deacons, and provide input to the elders and deacons at a regularly scheduled meeting.

3. **Qualified Electors:** The elders will qualify electors. Three weeks prior to any election to church office, the election will be announced and the ballot will be provided to the electors. Those who desire to vote but who do not receive a ballot may contact the elders. If qualified, they will be provided a ballot in time for the election.

4. **Elections:** Elections will be conducted at appropriate times set by the elders.

5. **Heads of Households Meetings:** The congregation will hold a regular (currently bimonthly) meeting of heads of member households, which will be the normal channel through which the elders and deacons receive advice from the representatives of the church's households.

## **Article II: Selection of Elders and Deacons**

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

2. If the elders unanimously agree that the candidate is fit for office, then they will nominate him to office. Once nominated, the candidate for elder will work through a short course of training on eldership under the oversight of the elders. When, in their unanimous judgment, the candidate has shown his fitness for office, his name will then be placed on a ballot sent to all electors. A nominated diaconate candidate will be included by the deacons in their work in order to prove his fitness for office (1 Tim 3:10). When, in the unanimous judgment of the Deacons, the candidate has shown this, the deacons will make a recommendation to the elders to place his name on the ballot to which the elders must give their unanimous consent. Each ballot will provide the option of voting either yes, no, or abstain.

3. If the candidate receives the unanimous support of the church (Phil. 2:1-4), the elders will ordain the new officer through the laying on of hands and prayer (cf. 1 Tim 4:14; 5:22; Acts 6:6).

4. The requirement for congregational unanimity may be set aside only through the unanimous consent of the elders, and that only after the elders have determined that the objections are unscriptural or unwarranted. However, refusal to overturn these objections does not constitute agreement with the objections on the part of the elders.

5. If the objections are overturned, then one of the elders will meet with those who objected to discuss the elders' decision.

6. If a candidate for office is not elected, then one of the elders will meet with him within one week to discuss the election and answer any questions the candidate might have.

7. Once installed, the elder or deacon will serve for life, unless he resigns or is removed.

## **Article III: Duties of Church Officers**

### **A. Elders**

1. The elders are collectively responsible to oversee the following:

- a. Ruling/shepherding (1 Pet. 5:1-2).
- b. Equipping (Eph. 4:11-12).
- c. Prayer/fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3).
- d. Teaching/preaching (1 Tim. 5:17).
- e. Administering baptism and the Lord's Table (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).
- f. Administering church discipline and restoration (1 Cor. 5:1-5).
- g. Prayer for the healing of the sick (Jas. 5:14-15).
- h. Delegating responsibilities to the deacons, hiring and firing church staff, defining the responsibilities of church staff, and delegating responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries. The elders will approve the annual budget.
- i. Commissioning or licensing ministerial students, and overseeing the course of their training for the eldership. Under the guidance and oversight of the board of elders, such commissioned individuals will have the opportunity to perform all the various ministerial functions of elders, participation in the rule of the church being the only exception.

2. **Conduct of Elders' Meetings:** All usual business of the elders will be conducted at their regular meetings or at special meetings called for a particular purpose. The elders will appoint one of their number to moderate the meetings of the elders, and one to record the minutes of the meetings.

a. **Responsibilities of Individual Elders:** Elders are responsible for those duties delegated to them by the body of elders, and recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts and desires. Elders with such a charge will serve willingly, and without domineering in the discharge of their assigned duties, whether pastoral or administrative (1 Peter 5:1-3). There is no distinction of rank within the body of elders.

b. Under Christ, the highest authority in the local church is the board of elders or presbyters in Session. While all the elders are equally involved in ruling the church, some presbyters are to be recognized by the church as also given to the labor of word and doctrine. As elders, all share the same rank and authority without distinction. Nevertheless, the church acknowledges the variety of gifts and callings God gives to men, and recognizes that some of the elders, though equal in rank and authority, are especially gifted and called to preach the Word, and to teach right doctrine (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

c. Our church therefore recognizes three distinct callings or offices related to the Session of elders for this local church. The first is called to a pastoral ministry of the Word and Sacraments, and called by us a teaching elder, minister, or pastor (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:2-4). A second is called to a didactic ministry of the Word, called by us a teacher or doctor (1 Cor. 12:28; James 3:1). A third is called to government and rule according to the Word, called by us a ruler or ruling elder (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7,17; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28). The names used for these callings are descriptive only, not titular or honorific (Matt. 23:8-10).

d. The ruling elders principally function in the government of the church. The teachers share this rule, and are also responsible for teaching and instruction from the Word. The ministers also share in the rule of the church, and in addition are principally responsible for the proclamation of the Word on the Lord's Day, as well as the general oversight of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Each elder will have his calling and office acknowledged by the elders in Session.

e. In all meetings of the Session of presbyters, each elder has one vote. The meetings of the Session will be moderated by an elder selected by the other elders. In their capacity as a Session, the elders oversee all the affairs of the church, including the particular labors of teachers and ministers.

4. **Compensation:** Those elders whose assigned duties preclude them from providing for their families in the ordinary way must be compensated by the church (1 Tim. 5:17-18). This obligation is not the same as vocation in the secular world, for the obligations and requirements of an elder are that he maintain his biblical qualification for office in order to benefit from the support of the church.

## **B. Deacons**

1. **Responsibilities of Deacons:** Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons will manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church (Acts 6:2-4). Such responsibilities include preparing and administering the annual budget, building maintenance, fellowship meals, administration of subordinate ministries, office support, and administering the Deacons' Fund.

2. **Conduct of Deacons' Meetings:** All usual business of the deacons will be conducted at their regular meeting, or at a special meeting called for a particular purpose. The deacons will appoint one of their number to moderate the meetings of the deacons. The deacons will be prepared to give a general report of their work at each Heads of Households meeting, they will provide a quarterly financial report to the church, and they will give an annual report to the elders with proposals for the upcoming year.

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

### **4. Administering the Deacons' Fund:**

- a. In the benevolent functions of the church, the deacons are responsible to maintain the biblical standards of money, charity, work, and related issues (Gal. 6:10; 2 Thes. 3:4-16; Eph. 4:28; 1Tim. 5:3-4, 8; Is. 10:1-4).
- b. The Deacons' Fund is available to members to meet pressing needs. When a need is made known through the elders, deacons, or members of the church, the deacons will examine the scope and urgency of the need and present it to the elders. Upon approval by the elders, the family or individual will be placed on the Deacons' Fund until the need is met or they are removed for other reasons.
- c. Upon being placed on the list for the Deacons' Fund, the head of the household will be asked to submit an acceptable household budget to the deacons within thirty days. A deacon or elder will be assigned to review the family budget, determine the actual level of need, and give counsel and financial advice as necessary.
- d. If able, the head of the household is required to work at a full-time job.
- e. The household will be discouraged from receiving public assistance in the form of food stamps or direct welfare payments, not including medical reimbursements or assistance.
- f. In case of one-time needs exceeding \$1000, the deacons will seek elder approval for the expenditure at the

next regular elder meeting. If the need cannot be met from the Deacons' Fund, the deacons may seek elder approval to move funds from general savings to meet the need. A household budget will not be required for one-time needs paid in full from the Deacons' Fund. However, a budget will be requested by the deacons if the family stays on the list for the Deacons' Fund after that particular need is met. In case of one-time needs, the deacons may, with elder approval, assist families who are in need but who are not members. These families are not eligible to stay on the list for the Deacons' Fund after that particular need is met. Non-members may not receive regular assistance from the Deacons' Fund.

- g. Families supported by the Deacons' Fund will be visited by a deacon at least once a month to ensure their financial needs are being met. Budget counseling will be provided by the deacons when necessary. If there are spiritual matters which need attention, the deacons will notify the elders. The deacons will report regularly to the elders on the status of families remaining on the list for the Deacons' Fund more than three months.
- h. Indigent giving will be decided by the deacons on a case-by-case basis. As a general rule the deacons will not disburse money to indigents, but will purchase items necessary to meet basic needs in such areas as food, clothing, shelter, and travel.

#### **5. Christian Education Fund:**

- a. The Christian Education Fund is a special category of the Deacons' Fund. Monies from the fund will be available to help qualified families with expenses associated with providing a biblical education for their dependent children, whether for homeschooling, tutorial services, or a private Christian school. The fund will be supplied as an item in the annual budget and through designated gifts.
- b. In ordinary situations, the family concerned will be asked to show its commitment to Christian education through providing as much for their children's' education as their budget will allow. In extraordinary situations, the entire cost may be borne by the fund.
- c. Whenever possible, payments will be made directly to the school, tutorial service , textbook supplier, etc.
- d. Recipients of the Christian Education Fund must qualify fully for the Deacons' Fund.
- e. In addition to Deacons' Fund criteria, the following standards also apply. The elders must have reason to believe that, due to personal or financial constraints, the children are likely to receive non-Christian or sub-standard Christian education. The family will receive consistent pastoral counseling for the duration of support from the fund, consistent with the circumstances. The deacons will verify that the fund is not being used to pay tuition in such a way as to receive a tax write-off.
- f. Recipients must be re-approved in July for the following school year. After a family has received support for one school year, the deacons will assign a member to review the family's household budget and help them set up a plan to assume the entire cost of their children's education.

#### **C. Resignation of Elders or Deacons**

1. If an elder or deacon desires to resign his office or take a leave of absence, he will present a letter expressing this desire and explaining his reasons to the board of elders. The elders will notify the men of the church at the next monthly household meeting of their receipt of the letter. If the desire of the elder or deacon concerned is unchanged by the following monthly household meeting, then the elders will read a statement to the assembled men accepting the resignation, or approving the leave of absence.
2. If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal turpitude, then the elders must exercise biblical discipline prior to, or in conjunction with, any consideration of the letter of resignation.

## **Article 4: Removal of Elders and Deacons**

1. If one of the saints believes an elder or deacon may be morally or doctrinally unfit for his office, the scriptural requirement for him is clear: he is to approach that officer individually first (Matt. 18:15), and then with one or two others (Matt. 18:16). If the problem remains, then the individual, with the two or three witnesses, should come to the elder board and present the charges (1 Tim. 5:19).
2. If the charges are doctrinal or moral in nature, and if the elder board, excluding (if applicable) the accused elder, unanimously decides that the question merits an investigation and/or trial, then they will (a) inform the heads of households of the nature of the charges, (b) announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or trial, and (c) encourage the heads of households to attend.
3. If the charges are unanimously sustained by the elders, then the accused elder or deacon, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction, may be rebuked in the presence of the congregation (1 Tim. 5:20), or may be removed from the office of elder or deacon (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9), or both.

## **Article 5: Discipline**

### **A. Informal Church Discipline**

The ordinary course of discipline is informal. Members are encouraged to self-discipline, overlooking the failings of others in love (1 Pet. 4:8), and encouraging other members to covenant faithfulness by confronting brothers and sisters who are in sin and bringing along witnesses when necessary (Matt. 18:15, 16). In the case of open and scandalous sin, there is no requirement to attempt private resolution of the matter, and it should be brought to the elders without delay.

### **B. Formal Church Discipline**

If informal discipline does not result in satisfactory correction, then those who are aware of the need for discipline are expected to call the matter to the attention of the elders. Formal discipline will be pursued only after Scriptural prerequisites have been satisfied and the elders have made sufficient inquiry. Such discipline is applied through the formal action and unanimous judgment of the elders. In extraordinary situations, the elders have the authority to take immediate disciplinary action if the honor of Christ or the purity of the church is directly threatened by a failure to act. Except in such extraordinary cases, the pattern of formal church discipline will generally include (1) private admonishment by the elders, (2) formal public admonishment and suspension from the Supper (called by us excommunication or barring from the Table, 2 Thess. 3:14-15), and (3) a formal hearing which may result in being put out of the church (Matt. 18:17) and being delivered over to Satan (1 Cor 5:4,5; 1 Tim 1:20).

### **C. Subjects of Church Discipline**

The only persons who may undergo formal church discipline are baptized members of member households. Unbaptized members of member households and Christians who attend this church regularly (but are non-members) are subject to pastoral admonishment but may not be put out of the church. Nevertheless, a non-member who is divisive, heretical, scandalous, or factious may be barred from the Lord's Supper and rejected after proper admonition (1 Tim. 3:10). If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to this church, 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 unanimously rejects such disciplinary actions as out of accord with the government of Christ.

### **D. Procedures for Church Discipline**

1. The elders shall establish the specific procedures for all formal discipline on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to

the circumstances and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include a clear and timely warning of the individual that he is in the process of formal discipline, two or three visits or communications involving two or three witnesses, and clear records and/or minutes of the entire proceedings kept by the elders.

2. 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 in writing of the specific charges, the time, place, and date of the trial, and ample time for the accused to prepare a defense.

3. The heads of households will be informed of the hearing at the first opportunity. At the hearing, one of the elders will present 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. The accused will be considered innocent until proven guilty.

4. At a separate meeting of the elders, a vote will be taken on each of the charges. The elders will declare their verdict to the congregation on an appointed Lord's Day, following an appropriate exhortation. The accused will be given a written copy of the verdict.

5. The elders will establish an official file containing all the records pertaining to the hearing, including all pertinent correspondence, transcripts, and minutes. If he requests it, the accused will be given one copy of this file at the expense of the church.

#### **E. Appeals for Assistance**

Members may appeal the actions of the Session to the Communion of Reforming Churches. Any such appeals will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the Communion of Reforming Churches. Elders will abide by the decisions of the CORC, unless those decisions can be demonstrated to contradict sound biblical principles.

#### **F. Restoration of the Party Disciplined**

The goal of church discipline is restorative not punitive. Hence, this church is eager to receive back into her fold those sheep who have wandered. When, in the unanimous opinion of the elders, the one under discipline has repented, he will be publicly restored—a confession of his repentance will be read to the congregation on the Lord's Day and the elders shall formally announce the end of the discipline and restoration of fellowship.

### ***Article 6: Subordinate Ministries***

The elders may unanimously delegate to an individual or board the executive authority of any subordinate ministry established by the elders. This executive responsibility continues at the pleasure of the elders. In order to dismiss such an individual, or remove someone from such a board, a two-thirds vote of the elders is required. If the individual concerned is also an elder, he is excluded from voting on any matters concerning his own case. If separation of a subordinate ministry from this church becomes necessary, that action may be authorized by a unanimous vote of the elders.

All formal actions concerning subordinate ministries will be entered in the minutes of the elders' meetings.

### ***Article 7: Incorporation***

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

2. This church maintains its status as an unincorporated and unregistered church as a matter of conscience.

3. As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, this church accepts various burdens and entanglements of civil regulation and taxation under protest.

4. This church has constituted herself, under the authority and headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an association of

natural persons, and is recognized as such by the laws of the State of Montana.

### ***Article 8: Amendments***

The Confession of Faith and Constitution may be amended at any time through unanimous consent of the elders, when the following conditions have been first fulfilled.

1. There is a first reading of the proposed change at the following Heads of Households meeting.
2. A written copy of the proposed change(s) is (are) made available to the congregation at church.
3. The elders seek due consultation with the heads of households of the church at a subsequent Heads of Households meeting.

### ***Appendix A: Affiliation***