

# Constitution of Christ Covenant Church of Grande Prairie

## Preamble

In the Church of God, all things are to be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). This command pertains to the government of the Church as much as to the corporate worship of the Church. Convinced that Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, will protect and guide her, we seek to obey Scripture through the following standards for the orderly and scriptural government of our church, Christ Covenant Church. These standards do not supplant Scripture, but rather are an expression of biblical church government under God. While biblical, these standards are primarily procedural; the doctrinal position of the church may be found in our Confession of Faith.

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures by maintaining and promoting His worship both individually and corporately, by evangelizing sinners, and by edifying His saints. Therefore, we are committed to the proclamation of the glorious Gospel of God's grace through all the world, to the defence of that "faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), and to the pure and faithful celebration of the sacraments of the New Covenant.

Our intention is to submit to all those principles regarding church government that are clearly required by Scripture, or required by deductions from Scripture, which can be understood through good and necessary consequence. For the rest, we desire to operate in terms of a sanctified Christian prudence, with all things done in good order and biblical decency. At all times, we seek to submit to the Scriptures and to reflect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ps. 133; Eph. 4:3, 13).

Our desire is to acknowledge, preserve and manifest unity, preserve purity, and advance Christ's kingdom in an orderly and reasonable way, resulting in mutual edification, accountability, and spiritual discipline. To this end, Christ Covenant Church of Grande Prairie is a member of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches ([www.crechurches.org](http://www.crechurches.org)), with the constitutional requirements thereby entailed. Membership in this communion is in no way meant to exclude warm, fraternal, and working relations with other faithful Christian bodies. We therefore welcome and encourage formal, non-binding, fraternal relations with likeminded churches, presbyteries and denominations.

## Article 1: Confession of Faith

We acknowledge the ultimate authority of the Holy Scriptures in all matters of the Christian faith.

We have adopted the following historic confessions as our Confession of Faith. We believe that they contain the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures: the Ecumenical Creeds (the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, the *Definition of Chalcedon*, and the *Athanasian Creed*) and the *Three Forms of Unity* (the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and the *Canons of Dort*).

These confessions not only summarize the heart of the Christian faith, but also summarize some of our distinctives as a particular body. Still, our confessions do not necessarily define the boundaries of our fellowship or membership.

These confessions do represent the doctrinal understanding of the eldership of Christ Covenant Church, and it is our intention that the teaching and preaching at Christ Covenant Church reflect this understanding also.

As a body of reformational evangelicals, we seek to display our unity in truth with other faithful Churches, not only in the present, but also with the historic Christian Church throughout the ages. Although we have

not officially adopted other confessions, we are in general agreement with much contained in the other historic confessions of the Reformation.

From time to time, our church may adopt position papers on current issues. These papers do not carry the same weight as our confessions. They have stood neither the test of time nor the scrutiny of the Church universal; however, they do represent the thinking of the eldership on a particular issue.

## **Article 2: Membership**

### **Members**

Membership shall be composed of confessing members and communicant members. The elders shall determine whether to receive an applicant for membership as a confessing member or a communicant member.

Confessing members are those of at least the age of 18 who: have appeared before an elder and have expressed their agreement with this constitution and have committed themselves to full participation in the life of Christ Covenant Church.

Communicant members include the baptized children of confessing or communicant members and those who wish to participate in the life of Christ Covenant Church but have not formally affirmed their agreement with this constitution.

Communicant children are eligible, and are encouraged, to become confessing members when they reach the age of 18.

Communicant adults must be baptized and shall appear before an elder to give a credible profession of their faith in Christ as Saviour. They shall enjoy all the privileges of fellowship, worship, and service under the supervision of the pastor and spiritual leaders but shall not vote in congregational meetings, and may not serve as an elder or deacon.

Periodically, but at least annually, the session shall review the church roll to determine those members who have been regularly absent from worship services to consider appropriate action. No inactive roll shall be established.

If a confessing member no longer affirms this Constitution, he or she shall inform the elders, who may make him or her a communicant member.

### **Voting**

Only confessing members shall have the right to vote on all matters presented by the eldership for vote at any congregational meeting. Voting rights shall be as follows:

- (a) where a husband and wife are both confessing members of the church, the husband and wife shall have a household vote valued as two votes, which shall be cast by the household head;
- (b) where either a husband or a wife is a confessing member of the church but the other is not, the one being a confessing member of the church shall have a right to vote;
- (c) where a confessing member is not married, he or she shall have the right to vote.

A communicant member may express his or her opinions on all matters presented by the eldership at a congregational meeting, but he or she may not vote.

## **Transfer of Membership**

If any member requests to be transferred to the care of another Christian church recognized by the elders, the elders in council will transfer him with a blessing, except as noted below. If any member requests a transfer after committing a disciplinable offence, the elders in council will delay acting on the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved. Members of this church who wilfully, without plausible reason or excuse, consistently absent themselves from the Lord's Day worship shall be subject to church discipline.

## **Article 3: Elders and Deacons**

### **Elder Leadership and Elders**

Christ is the head of the Church (Eph. 5:23) and, according to His Word, the form of local congregational government is a plurality of qualified men exercising leadership in the local congregation of believers (1 Pet. 5:1; Phil. 1:1). The office designated for ruling and shepherding the Church is the office of elder (1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5-9). Therefore, under Christ, the ordained authority within the local church is the elders in council. The elders in council act corporately to govern the Church of God (1 Tim. 5:17). Active and inactive elders shall serve as the directors of Christ Covenant Church of Grande Prairie.

### **The Duties of Elders**

The elders in council are collectively responsible for ruling/shepherding (1 Pet. 5:1-2); equipping (Eph. 4:11-12); prayer/fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3); teaching/preaching (1 Tim. 5:17); leading and ordering worship (1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Cor. 14:40); administering the sacraments, which are baptism and communion (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26, 40); administering church discipline and restoration (1 Cor. 5:1-5); and prayer for the healing of the sick (Jas. 5:14-15).

The elders in council are also authorized to delegate responsibilities to the deacons, hire church staff, define responsibilities for church staff, delegate responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries (as determined by the elders in session), and pre-approve the annual budget for congregational consideration. The elders in council may also commission or license ministerial students, and oversee the course of their training for the eldership. Under the guidance and oversight of the elders in session, such men may perform all the various ministerial functions of elders, participation in the governance of the church excepted.

Elder business will be conducted at regularly scheduled meetings or at special meetings called for the purpose. The elders in council will record accurate minutes of the actions taken in their meetings. In all meetings of the elders in council, each elder will have one vote.

Vocational elders (commonly called pastors) will be examined by the elders in council of Christ Covenant Church of Grande Prairie, with regard to their manner of life, knowledge of Scripture, and doctrinal understanding. The terms of their call, including compensation, vacation time, ministerial expenses, etc., shall also be determined by the elders in council, and reviewed annually.

### **Duties of Deacons**

Under the general oversight of the elders in council, 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, building maintenance, fellowship meals, administrative review of subordinate ministries, office support, administration of the deacons' fund, and any other duties the elders in council may assign to them.

The business of the deacons will be conducted at regular meetings or with meetings in conjunction with the elders, as the elders in council deem necessary. Accurate minutes of such meetings will be kept and the deacons will give regular reports to the elders, as well as an annual financial report.

### **Ordination of Elders and Deacons**

The elders in council will examine any potential candidate for elder or deacon 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 this Constitution or the Confession of Faith, then he must inform the elders in council 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). A nomination may be received from any member, elder or deacon at any time, if it is delivered to an elder in writing. Nominated willing individuals who are accepted by the elders in session may undergo some training, instruction, and examination. The elders in council, after considerations during or after the time of training, instruction, and examination, may or may not approve the nominee.

Once the elders in council approve a nominee, all confessing members will vote on whether they believe he fulfills the biblical qualifications for office.

If the candidate receives a two thirds majority support of the congregation, the elders will ordain him for a two year term through the laying on of hands and prayer. If any elector votes no and includes a reason for the no vote on the ballot, the elders must carefully weigh the scriptural merit of the objection before ordaining the elder elect.

At the end of a two year term, if he desires to continue serving the congregation, the parish elder must be reaffirmed by a two thirds majority vote of the entire congregation. If elected, the elders will extend his ordination for an additional five year term. If any elector votes no and includes a reason for the no vote on the ballot, the elders must carefully weigh the scriptural merit of the objection before ordaining the elder elect.

After the subsequent five year term, if the elder wishes to continue his service, another church wide election will occur. The term of his service will be determined by the mutual agreement of candidate, council, and congregation.

Other terms of service than those specified above may be determined as needed by the mutual agreement of candidate, council, and congregation.

### **Resignation of Elders or Deacons**

If an elder or deacon desires to resign or take a leave of absence, he will present a letter to the elders in council. The elders in council will notify the church as soon as possible.

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.

### **Removal of Elders and Deacons**

If two or three witnesses believe an elder or deacon to be morally or doctrinally unfit for office, then they will present written charges to the elders in session (1 Tim. 5:19). If the elders in council (excluding the accused, in such a case) decide that the question merits an investigation and/or hearing, at their discretion, they may inform the church of the charges, announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or hearing, and encourage the heads of households to attend. If the charges are sustained by the other elders, then the accused elder or deacon, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction,

may be rebuked at a church meeting (1 Tim. 5:20), or may be removed from the office of elder or deacon (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), or both.

#### **Article 4: Church Discipline**

Any member of Christ Covenant Church is subject to her discipline.

The ordinary course of discipline is informal. Members are encouraged to practise self-discipline and encourage other members to covenant faithfulness (Matt. 18:15).

Formal church discipline is applied through the formal action and judgment of the elders in council when unrepented sin is identified. Except in cases of scandal requiring immediate action, the pattern of church discipline will generally include formal private admonishment by two or three witnesses (Matt. 18:16), and a formal hearing which may result in excommunication (Matt. 18:17).

Christians who attend church regularly, but are non-members, are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church but not excommunication. Such admonishment may include excluding the person from partaking of Communion. If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to our church, the elders will decide whether to honour the discipline of the other church after due consultation with the person concerned and after all appropriate information is sought from the disciplining church.

The elders in council 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 to the individual that he or she is in the process of formal discipline, two or three visits or communications each involving two or three witnesses, and clear records and/or minutes of the entire proceedings kept by the elders in council.

When the elders in council determine that a trial 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 provision of ample time for the accused to prepare a defence.

The congregation will be informed of the trial at the first opportunity. At the trial, one of the elders or deacons 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 defence, including the right to question any witnesses.

At a separate meeting of the elders in council, a vote will be taken on each of the charges. The elders in council 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.

The elders in council 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. Any appeals to presbytery will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches, pending Christ Covenant Church's acceptance into the CREC.

Excommunication will end when, in the opinion of the elders in council, 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 in council shall formally announce the end of the discipline and restoration of fellowship.

## **Article 5: Worship**

### **The Covenantal Form of Worship**

The Lord's Day worship service is understood in light of the covenantal relationship between God and His people. Thus, we celebrate communion weekly and enjoin all baptized members of the covenant to participate. Thus, the order of our worship follows the robustly Biblical pattern of call, confession, consecration, communion, and commission.

### **The Schedule of Worship and Church Meetings**

Worship services shall be held as often as the elders determine, but the regular schedule of meetings shall always include the Lord's Day service. Other ministries, such as biblical and theological classes for further ministry training, special conferences and seminars, fellowship activities, and outreach ministries, shall be scheduled according to the needs of the congregation at the discretion of the elders in accordance with God's Word.

### **The Nature of Baptism**

Baptism is a blessed sacrament of the New Testament instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of salvation. The sacramental washing with water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit officially admits a person into the Church, testifies of his or her 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 (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:11,12; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-5; Tit. 3:5; Mark 1:4; Matt. 28:19,20).

### ***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 participation in the covenant, Church, and kingdom of our Saviour. And to them, no less than to adults, do the benefits of Christ and His redemption accomplished apply (Acts 2:39; Matt. 18:15-17; Eph. 6:4). That which is signified and conferred in baptism, therefore, is applicable to infants who receive God's covenant promises therein, just as do adults who profess faith in Christ.

Though the elders uphold the teaching of our Confession of Faith on baptism, we recognize that faithful Christians, possibly some of our own members, disagree with our practice of infant baptism (i.e. paedobaptism), and believe that only those who are able to give a "credible" profession should be baptized (i.e. credobaptism). We respect our brothers and sisters and promise to strive together to come to one mind.

All baptismal candidates, infants or professing believers, must be approved by the elders. When a child in a credo-baptistic home comes to a personal profession of faith in the Lord, the parents should notify the elders, who will confirm their child's profession, and arrange a time for the baptism. Infants in a paedobaptistic home should be baptized as soon as possible.

### **Communion**

Communion is a blessed sacrament of the New Testament instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of His redemptive work. By eating the bread and drinking the cup in a worthy manner, believers spiritually feed upon Christ, renew their union and communion with Him, acknowledge His redemptive work on their

behalf, renew their thankfulness for His saving work, and spiritually commune with other believers (Luke 22:20; Mat. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Cor. 10:14-21; Jn. 6:32-58).

### ***Recipients of Communion***

Communion is for all the Lord's people. Hence, we practice "open communion" as defined in the following way: We encourage all baptized Christians who are members of a local church (and not censured under church discipline) to celebrate the feast of communion and feed upon Christ. Communion is integral to the act of confession, repentance, renewal, and abiding in Christ. Moreover, communion should be received by all baptized covenant members in good ecclesiastical standing, including baptized children being raised in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the sacraments remains with the elders.

We recognize that there are faithful Christians who may disagree with our practice of open communion. We respect our brothers and sisters and promise to strive together to come to one mind. In all cases, recipients of communion must be baptized.

### **Article 6: Constitution Authority**

This Constitution, as any other non-inspired document, is not infallible. It does, reflect, however, an earnest and sincere attempt to apply the Scriptures in ordering the life of this local church. Therefore, the demands of the ninth commandment, and the sanctity of truth in general, require that the elders and all of the members of this church abide by our mutual commitment.

The Confession of Faith (found in Article 1) may be augmented by the inclusion of other Creeds or Confessions and this Constitution may be amended at any time with the consent of at least three-quarters of the elders in council when the following conditions have been first fulfilled:

- a. A written copy of the proposed change has been made available to the congregation.
- b. The congregation has had one month to discuss the changes with the elders.

### **Article 7: Dissolution**

In the event of the dissolution of Christ Covenant Church of Grande Prairie, all of its debts shall be fully satisfied. None of its assets or holdings shall be divided among the members or other individuals but shall be irrevocably designated by the elders in council prior to dissolution to such other nonprofit corporation or corporations or Reformed ministries or churches as are in agreement with the letter and spirit of the Confession of Faith adopted by this church, who are also qualified donees described in subsection 149.1(1) of the Income Tax Act of Canada.

### **Article 8: Non-Profit Character**

Christ Covenant Church shall be carried on without purpose of gain for its members, and any profits or other gains to the organization shall be used in promoting its objectives.