

Christ Church

Branchville, Alabama

Constitution

CONTENTS

- Preamble
- Confession of Faith
- Members and Electors
- Selection of Church Officers
- Duties of Church Officers
- Other Duties in the Church
- Removal of Church Officers
- Church Discipline
- Subordinate Ministries
- Incorporation
- Affiliation
- Amendments

PREAMBLE

In submission to Scripture, we confess that the purpose of our church is to glorify God as a covenant community and enjoy Him together by worshiping Christ and equipping God's people to extend His Lordship down through our generations and out into the world. We seek to accomplish this purpose and vision through:

- the comprehensive application of **Scripture** to all of life and society;
- vibrant, joyful, and reverent **worship** that exalts our glorious King;
- humility and the love of the **covenant community** that binds us together in Christ; and
- strengthening the **family** as God's primary building block for the church and society.

Our philosophy of ministry is for the elders of the church to teach men to fulfill their roles as the covenant heads of their households, serving their families and individuals that God brings under their care as providers, protectors, and spiritual leaders. If God wills, our desire is to have a multigenerational influence in the St. Clair County area and beyond. We aim to build strong covenant households who will extend the principles of God's Word in their spheres of influence thus taking dominion in the world for Christ. We pray that the Lord would enable us to further His kingdom by planting other churches in St. Clair County, in the Southeastern states, and in strategic areas of the world. We seek to accomplish this by:

- encouraging the multiplication of our local covenant community over time;
- providing leadership and teaching assistance from our elders both locally and abroad;
- identifying, equipping, and sending those with the gift and calling of evangelist (church planter); and
- supporting other pastors/evangelists in planting churches in strategic locations throughout the world.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

While doctrinal statements are useful and necessary tools, they are not infallible and must be subordinate to Holy Scripture. Christ Church confesses the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Definition of Chalcedon and the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms as our doctrinal standards, with the following exceptions:

- 1) We do not believe that baptized children should be excluded from the Lord's Supper (*WLC*, 177).
- 2) We do not believe that recreations are necessarily sinful when God's people are engaged in their celebration of the Lord's Day (*WCF*, 21.7).
- 3) We do not believe that the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church is the 'antichrist' (*WCF*, 25.6).
- 4) We believe there is one office of elder and all elders may administer the sacraments (*WCF*, 27.4, 28.2, 29.3).

We also value other creeds of the Early Church, such as the Athanasian Creed and other reformed confessions, such as the Three Forms of Unity.

MEMBERS AND ELECTORS

Membership is normally reckoned by household. A household in our geographical region is eligible when the head of that household has been lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) and does not contradict his profession through his manner of life (Matt. 7:22-23). Membership begins when the covenant membership vows have been taken (Heb. 13:7, 17). The elders oversee a membership list, which must include names, baptisms, and communicant status. As circumstances require, individuals may join the church. Our membership vows are:

- 1) Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?
- 2) Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
- 3) Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live in a manner that would honor Christ?
- 4) Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?
- 5) Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to uphold its purity and peace?

When the vows are presented to the head of a household, he will also be asked if he speaks on behalf of his household. When these vows are taken, the congregation will respond with "Amen" when they are asked:

"As a congregation of Christ, do you receive [this Christian/these Christians] into the covenant fellowship of this local church together with you, renewing your membership vows as you do so?"

Individuals may be received into non-voting membership. In special cases, individuals may come under our pastoral care without coming into full membership.

Release or Transfer of Membership

If any member requests to be released to the care of another Christian church, the elders will normally release him with a blessing. If any member requests to be released because of disciplinary proceedings against him or someone in his household, the elders will delay acting on the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved. If members move from our geographical area, they are charged to find a new church home within six months. This time may be extended at the elders' discretion. After this time is expired, they are released from membership.

Communicant Members

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the sacraments remains with the elders, who nevertheless respect the pastoral responsibilities of the head of each household. Members of households who have been baptized and have come to the Lord's Table are communicant members of member households. Members of households who have not been baptized are recognized by the elders to be non-communicant members of member households.

Electors

Church voting is conducted by member households. Those members who vote in church elections are called electors. The electors are members in good standing within a member household from 20 years old and above or an individual member 20 years old and above. The head of household is responsible to discuss the ballots with his family members, seek consensus, and ultimately submit the ballots for his household. Electors vote: 1) in the elections of elders and deacons as stated below; 2) to ratify or amend the Constitution by a two thirds majority vote of the voting electors; 3) to approve the annual church budget by a two thirds majority vote of the voting electors; 4) to approve transfer of funds greater than 10% of the annual budget by a two thirds majority vote of the voting electors; 5) to buy, sell, lease, rent, mortgage, encumber and convey real property or incur any debt by a two thirds majority vote of the voting electors. The elders will qualify electors as to membership status, age, and manner of life. Three weeks prior to any church vote, a ballot will be provided. The vote will be conducted at an appropriate time set by the elders. The congregation will hold a meeting of the electors, as required, where the elders and deacons may receive input. Absentee ballots are permissible for church votes.

SELECTION OF CHURCH OFFICERS

The elders will examine any potential 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 this constitution, 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). Nominations are approved by at least two thirds consent of the elders.

Once nominated, the candidate for elder will work through a short course of training on eldership under the oversight of the elders. His name will then be placed on a ballot sent to all electors. Each ballot will provide the option of voting *yes*, or *no*. If the candidate receives at least two thirds support of the voting electors (Phil. 2:1-4), the elders will ordain him through laying on 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.

Once nominated, the candidate for deacon will be included by the deacons in their work in order to prove his fitness for office (1 Tim. 3:10). When in the judgment of at least two thirds of the deacons, the candidate has shown this, the deacons will make a recommendation to the elders. Then, in the judgment of at least two thirds of the elders, his name will then be placed on a ballot sent to all electors. Each ballot will provide the option of voting *yes*, or *no*. If the candidate receives at least two thirds support of the voting electors (Phil. 2:1-4), the elders will ordain him through laying on of hands and prayer.

When ordained, the elder or deacon will vow:

“As God is my witness, I solemnly vow that I will serve this church faithfully as a servant of Christ, and will maintain godly order in my life and my household as the Word of God requires.”

Once ordained, the elder or deacon will serve a three year term. At the end of this term, if he desires to continue serving the congregation, the elder or deacon must be reaffirmed by a two thirds majority vote of the voting electors, and then reaffirmed every three years thereafter in the same manner. No more than half of the elders or half of the deacons will be eligible for reaffirmation in a given year. If at any time 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 or deacon elect.

DUTIES OF CHURCH OFFICERS

Duties of Elders and Pastor(s)

Under Christ, the authority of the local church is the board of elders or presbyters in session. The elders 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);

administering baptism and the Lord's Table (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26); administering church discipline and restoration (1 Cor. 5:1-5), and visiting the sick (Jas. 5:14-15).

The elders are responsible to delegate responsibilities to the deacons, hire and dismiss church staff, define responsibilities for church staff, delegate responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries, and approve the annual budget. The elders also commission or license ministerial students, and oversee the course of their training for the eldership. Under the guidance and oversight of the elders, such men may perform all the various ministerial functions of elders, participation in the rule of the church excepted.

Elder business will be conducted at least quarterly or at special meetings called for the purpose. Individual elders are responsible for those duties delegated to them by the elders in session, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts, abilities, and desires. Each elder will have his calling and office acknowledged by the elders in session. In all meetings of the session of presbyters, each elder has one vote.

Elders, functioning as pastors, whose assigned duties preclude them from providing for their families in the ordinary way will be compensated by the church (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Duties of Deacons

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, building maintenance, deacon's fund, fellowship meals, meals for the sick, bereaved, and recovering, administrative review of subordinate ministries, preparation of communion elements, and office support.

The business of the deacons will be conducted at their regular meeting, or at special meetings called for that purpose. The deacons will appoint a moderator for their meetings. The deacons will provide a quarterly financial report to the church, and an annual report to the elders with proposals for the coming year.

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.

Powers

Except as otherwise provided in this Constitution, the powers of Christ Church shall be exercised by, and its property controlled and its business and affairs conducted by or under the direction of the board of elders. With respect to any matters that would fall within the provisions this Constitution, the board of elders may act only by at least two thirds vote. The board of elders will have the authority to buy, sell, lease, rent, mortgage, encumber and convey real property or incur any debt subject to approval by at least two thirds of the electors. The board of elders will have the authority to hire and remove all church employees.

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. At the first appropriate household meeting, the elders will notify the men of the church of their receipt of the letter. If the desire of the elder or deacon concerned is unchanged by the following heads of households meeting, the elders will issue a statement accepting the resignation, or approving the leave of absence. If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal irregularity, the resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate biblical discipline. Leaves of absence will not be granted as a form of discipline.

OTHER DUTIES IN THE CHURCH

Duties of the Treasurer

The treasurer shall receive, have custody over, and be responsible for all moneys belonging to the church and its organization, including funds for the poor.

The treasurer shall make no payment of money belonging to the church except as authorized by the board of elders. The treasurer shall keep adequate accounting records. The treasurer shall provide to the elders and deacons a monthly report of

all finances. The treasurer may execute contracts when authorized by a vote of the board of elders. The treasurer is elected by at least two thirds of the elders and deacons to an indefinite term and is eligible for reelection.

REMOVAL OF CHURCH OFFICERS

If a church officer believes himself to be fit for office, but two or three believers hold that he is unfit, these two or three witnesses should request a special session of the elder board where they would be allowed to present their case (1 Tim. 5:19). If the elders, excluding the elder in question, unanimously decide that the case has merit, that church officer, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to the correction, will be rebuked in the presence of the heads of households (1 Tim. 5:20), or will be recommended for removal from office (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). In such a case, the electors must vote to either sustain his call or not. If the electors sustain his call by a two thirds majority vote of the voting electors, the other elders must afterwards concede to his call.

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. For cases that do not involve moral failures or disciplinary proceedings (e.g., Acts 15:33-41, Romans 15:22-33, 1 Corinthians 16:5-12), the procedure for terminating the call of a pastor, thereby dismissing him from service at Christ Church, is as follows: If a pastor desires to terminate his call, he shall duly inform the session of his desire. In the case of an involuntary termination of his call, a pastor may be recommended for dismissal from service at Christ Church by a unanimous vote of the session (excluding said pastor). In such cases, the recommendation will be subject to a two-thirds majority vote of the voting electors. The electors must vote to either sustain his call or not. If the electors sustain his call by a two thirds majority vote of the voting electors, the other elders must afterwards concede to his call.

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 (Matt. 18:15).

Formal church discipline is applied through the formal action and unanimous judgment of the elders. The elders may, by unanimous consent (excluding the elder in question), require a fellow elder to abstain from voting in the case of a conflict of interest. Except in cases of scandal requiring immediate action, the pattern of church discipline will generally include formal private admonishment by two or three (Matt. 18:16), formal public admonishment and suspension from the Supper (2 Thess. 3:14-15), and a formal hearing which may result in excommunication (Matt. 18:17).

Any communicant member of a member household may be disciplined by the church. Un-baptized members of member households are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church, but not excommunication. Christians who attend church regularly, but are non-members, are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church, but not excommunication. If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to our church, the elders will decide whether to honor 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 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.

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.

The heads of households meeting 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.

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.

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. Any appeals to presbytery will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelicals.

Excommunication will end when in the unanimous opinion 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 formally announce the end of the discipline and restoration of fellowship.

SUBORDINATE MINISTRIES

The elders may, by at least two thirds consent, 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. Separation of a subordinate ministry from Christ Church may be authorized by at least two thirds vote of the elders. All formal actions concerning subordinate ministries will be entered in the minutes of the elders' meetings.

INCORPORATION

As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ Church is not constituted or incorporated by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church. Christ Church maintains its status as an unincorporated church as a matter of conscience. As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ Church accepts the various burdens and entanglements of civil regulation and taxation under protest. Christ Church has constituted herself, under the authority and headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an association of natural persons, and recognized as such by the laws of the State of Alabama.

AFFILIATION

Christ Church is a member of the Confederation of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) and accepts all the constitutional requirements that come with this affiliation.

AMENDMENTS

The Christ Church Confession of Faith and Constitution may be amended by at least two thirds consent of the elders and approved by two-thirds of the voting electors.

Ratified February 11, 2007

Revised February 10, 2008

