

GOVERNING DOCUMENTS

of the

Communion of Reformed
Evangelical Churches

CONSTITUTION *and* BYLAWS

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Constitution and Bylaws of The Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches

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Preamble

The name of this confederation of churches is the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches [CREC]. We use the word Communion in its common sense of being participants in one particular body gathered within the broader body, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. By Reformed, we testify that we stand in the stream of historic Protestant orthodoxy and call to mind the importance of continual reformation and sanctification for the Church of Jesus Christ in light of Holy Scripture, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. By Evangelical, we confess that the Gospel of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, and the Church's calling is to proclaim it with love and doctrinal integrity. The nature of our affiliation is one of confederation, that is, we have formed a broad connection between churches which, with respect to polity, is representative, being neither hierarchical nor autonomous. Our gathering of churches is not intended as a separation from other orthodox believers who confess the name of Christ, but rather as a gathering within that broader church, in order to work together effectively for reformation.

With patterns of church order and confessional standards, one of the fundamental requirements of Scripture is honesty (Ex. 20:16). Consequently, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we charge you, the generations who will follow us in this confederation, to submit to the Scriptures with sincere and honest hearts, and to the standards of this confederation as consistent with the teaching of Scripture. When a portion of our order and confession is found to be out of conformity to Scripture, we charge you to amend it honestly, openly, and constitutionally, as men who must give an account to the God who searches the hearts of men. We charge you in the name of the Lord to abhor all forms of ignoring our intentions in what we have set down through dissembling, reinterpretation, dishonesty, relativism, pretended explanations, presumed spiritual maturity, assumed scholarly sophistication, compromise with any forms of sexual and gender-related activism, or outright lying, so that the living God will not strike you and your children with a curse. We charge you to serve Him in all diligence and honesty, so that the blessings of the covenant may extend to your children for a thousand generations.

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. Membership in this confederation is in no way meant to exclude warm relations with other faithful Christian bodies. We therefore welcome and encourage any relations with likeminded churches, presbyteries and denominations that are consistent with this Constitution.

Article I. Authority of Scripture

- A.** The Scriptures are always the ultimate and inerrant court of appeal (Ps. 18:30; 119:89; Matt. 4:4; John 16:12–15; Rom. 3:1–2; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:20–21). Because this is a constitutional document, a certain emphasis must be placed on creeds and confessions in what follows (Acts 15:1–31; 16:4–5; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17–18; John 1:14; 1 John 4:2–3; 2 John 7). However, in no way is it our intention to set such confessions of faith above or alongside the Scriptures. Our expectation is that all our churches will routinely teach and preach the whole counsel of God as expressed in Scripture (Acts 20:27; Matt. 4:4), and in all matters of doctrinal discussion and debate, an appeal to Scripture will always be the first resort. In accordance with our credal and confessional standards, we acknowledge the pre-eminence of Scripture.
- B.** Our intention is to submit to all those principles regarding church order, which 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. We make no claim that every detail of our confederated order is found in Scripture. At all times, we seek to reflect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ps. 133; Eph. 4:3, 13).

Article II. The Offices

- A.** The CREC takes no constitutional position on the validity of 2-, 3- or 4-office view of church polity. These documents use the word *pastor* or *minister* to refer to the man who has primary responsibility for leading worship on the Lord's Day.
- B.** Within the CREC each elder must be a member of the church, which he serves. This requirement may be waived on a case-by-case basis by a unanimous vote of the presbytery.
- C.** Each congregation must be committed in principle and practice to government by a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Jas. 5:14). Congregations without a plurality of elders must have accountability with another established CREC church.
- D.** Each congregation will be served as possible by a plurality of deacons (Acts 6:5–7; 1 Tim. 3:8–13).
- E.** The CREC affirms the need for spiritually-disciplined, well-educated pastors, qualified in their households, grounded in rigorous and wise handling of the Scriptures, and exhibiting a thorough understanding of the biblical world and life view (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9).
- F.** Any candidate for pastor, regardless of his level of formal education, will be examined before ordination (See Article IV.A.2.g). The candidate will be examined by a local session of elders with regard to his manner of life, knowledge of Scripture, and doctrinal understanding. The presbytery will also examine him with regard to his manner of life, knowledge of Scripture, and doctrinal understanding. The presbytery may or may not recommend his ordination to the session of the local congregation. The local session is not judicially bound by the recommendation of presbytery. If a local session does not abide by the presbytery recommendation, then the presbytery may or may not initiate proceedings according to Article IV.D.5.
- G.** If a pastor has already been ordained within the CREC, he may not be required to undergo a complete re-examination by another Presbytery (see BOP XI & Appendix B). If a man has been ordained outside the CREC, the local congregation ought to seek the wisdom of the presbytery in the examination of his ministerial credentials and views (see BOP XI & Appendix B).
- H.** If a church holding the 4-office view would like the ordination of a teacher to be recognized on a broader scale within the CREC, comparable to the way the ordination of a pastor currently is, such a church may request a modified examination of that man by presbytery.
- I.** Any institutions and processes of ministerial education and training that are formally associated with the CREC must be under the authority and supervision of a local session of elders in a local CREC church (2 Tim. 2:1–2).

Article III. Local Congregations

- A. We hold the local congregation has primacy in the structure of biblical church government (Heb. 13:7, 17) without denying the important blessings and obligations which come from broader connections and fellowship.
- B. Each church will adopt into its statement of faith the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon in the form found in Article X of this Constitution (1 Tim. 6:12). A CREC local church may use forms of the creeds that differ from the forms found in the CREC Constitution, provided that the alternative forms 1) differ only in being an alternative translation; and 2) the adopted form is approved at the Presbytery level at the stated meeting immediately following the decision by the local church to adopt an alternative form. Forms of the creeds which have been modernized for spelling and usage are acceptable. Forms which have been altered with regard to doctrinal content are not.
- C. Each church will adopt into its statement of faith at least one of the following:
1. Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)
 2. American Westminster Confession of Faith (1788)
 3. Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of the Synod at Dordt)
 4. Belgic Confession (1561)
 5. Heidelberg Catechism
 6. London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)
 7. Savoy Declaration (1658)
 8. Reformed Evangelical Confession (see Article XI)
 9. Second Helvetic Confession
 10. 39 Articles of Christian Religion
- D. Each church will adopt into its statement of faith the Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage adopted by CREC Council on August 26, 2020.

Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage

1. We confess that the church is subject to Christ, who is Lord over all. 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. With these truths in view, we declare the church's right to reject any attempts on the part of the state to impose on her institutionally or her members individually unbiblical, unnatural definitions of marriage or sexuality.

2. God created man male and female in the beginning for this very reason, that they might be joined together in the covenant of marriage as one flesh (Mark 10:5ff). 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).

3. We resist and reject all attempts to redefine marriage to include same-sex partnerships. Certainly, we desire to serve and love persons with homosexual desires or who engage in homosexual practices. 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 endorse 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.

4. We claim the right for our churches and church members (whatever their particular vocation) to refuse to host, officiate, or in any way support same-sex "marriage" ceremonies, not out of animus, but out of love for God, neighbor, and truth. Likewise, we refuse to host, officiate, or support other ceremonies that violate biblical teaching on marriage.

5. We reject transgenderism as a perversion of God's good creational order. There are only two sexes, male and female (Gen. 1:26-28). Sex is not fluid, it is binary. We reject the notion that gender is determined by one's feelings, or is detachable from biological and bodily givens. God forms each person genetically as a distinct male or female from the moment of conception. As God is the Creator, and makes each of us either male or female, we cannot unmake and remake ourselves into the opposite sex. Sex is an immutable feature of our identity as creatures; thus, it is impossible for anyone to change his or her sex.

6. Gender dysphoria should not be used to create a protected class of persons, in which one's feelings override the facts of biology, or in which the rights, dignity, and privacy of transgender persons override the rights, dignity, and privacy of others. Thus, we claim for our churches and church members (in whatever vocation they serve) the right to reject compliance with any public policies or laws that would require us to deny binary sexes, or to accept claims of gender identity that are contrary to one's God-assigned biology. We reject the legal redefinitions of sex and gender that divorce either of these realities from God-given biology. We claim the right to speak to people according to their God-given sex, rather than reinforcing gender dysphoric confusions by using alternative pronouns. We claim the right to restrict access to intimate facilities (e.g., bathrooms, nursing areas, shelters, etc.), to sex-specific events, etc., strictly according to God-given biological realities. In the case of someone who has already transitioned to the appearance of the opposite sex, the session of the local congregation will determine the wisest and most compassionate course of action.

7. All sexual sins can be forgiven through the shed blood of Christ, including the practice of sodomy and transgenderism. But forgiveness can never be separated from confession and repentance; forgiveness can never be separated from denying oneself and taking up the cross daily; forgiveness can never be separated from fighting against sin and pursuing holiness in the power of the Holy Spirit.

E. Criteria for membership

1. Before a congregation can be accepted into CREC membership it must:

- a) have its own constitution;
- b) have been in existence for at least two years;
- c) have at least two local elders, who are members of the church;
- d) have enough support from members to meet all regular expenses necessary to sustain the life of that congregation.

2. Congregations seeking membership with the CREC which do not meet the criteria set forth in subsection 1 of this section must come under the care of an existing CREC church and will be characterized as mission churches. Mission churches may have non-voting delegations at presbytery and church council meetings.

3. Membership of Mission Churches

- a) When a mission church comes to meet the criteria for a particularized church, it may be accepted into voting membership of the CREC by a two-thirds vote of presbytery.
- b) Any mission church sponsored in another geographical territory must receive the approval of the presbytery in which it resides.
- c) Any mission church accepted into the CREC membership must be particularized in the presbytery in which it resides.

F. Form of Subscription

1. Elders of CREC member churches must declare their honest subscription to the doctrine in the confessions adopted by their church (excluding declared amendments or exceptions). Subscription to the confessions does not mean that the confessions necessarily formulate the doctrine in the best manner, or that they are exhaustive statements of the doctrines confessed, or that they address every teaching of Scripture or condemn every error. Furthermore, subscription does not mean that churches are bound to the Scripture references and allusions, 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 confessions are to be embraced because they are derived from

the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, CREC churches are expected to reject all doctrines or opinions that are contrary to or inconsistent with the confessions (excluding declared amendments or exceptions).

2. A candidate church must declare any exceptions to its confessional standards prior to becoming a CREC member (Ex. 20:16; Col. 3:9). If a member church modifies its confessional standards in any way, including amendments and exceptions, the church must notify presbytery immediately. If presbytery determines that the modification places the church at odds with CREC standards, it may initiate proceedings according to Article IV.D.5.
- G. All members in good standing in a local CREC congregation must be received by any other CREC church regardless of confessional differences between the churches. All CREC churches will handle problems arising from differences in how membership is reckoned from church to church (e.g. individual vs. household) with all charity and good faith, seeking to include one another's members.
- H. In the transfer of members from one CREC church to another, differences arising from issues such as membership, paedobaptism and paedocommunion, must be handled with pastoral sensitivity. Receiving churches do not have to adopt or practice such variations, but they should do all within their power to accommodate them.
- I. Controversies within a local congregation regarding matters arising from differences between our various confessions will not be adjudicated beyond the local church level. All churches agree to work cheerfully and carefully in their study of doctrinal differences, and to strive for like-mindedness with one another (Rom. 12:16; 1 Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:16).
- J. The worship and work of each local congregation is ultimately to be governed by the teaching and godly examples supplied throughout all Scripture.
- K. After sending at least one candidate delegation to a stated meeting of presbytery, churches may be admitted to membership in a presbytery through a two thirds vote of the presbytery at its next stated meeting. The presbytery shall normally examine the pastor-elder delegation, especially with regard to their confessional status, sound doctrine, submission to CREC authority, and desire to uphold other CREC churches with all peace and love. They may remove themselves by whatever means their respective constitutions allow. When a church joins the CREC, this entire document through Article X must be adopted into that church's constitutional documents, according to the constitutional processes and standards of that church. The membership of the local church in the CREC is finalized at that point, and not before. New members shall make vows to the faithfulness and commitment to the churches and standards of the CREC. Likewise, current members should pledge to uphold the new church in prayer and love.
- L. In making a motion to seat a candidate church, a sponsoring church needs to be prepared to answer questions concerning the general health of that church and the likelihood of that church being able to embrace the CREC constitution when considered for full membership. The church which makes the motion to seat the candidate church must be the church which moves to receive the church into full membership when that issue comes before presbytery. The church which moves to receive the church into membership must be prepared to answer questions related to the doctrinal integrity of the church's confession, and the moral, spiritual, and covenantal health of the families of the officers.
- M. The candidacy of a church will not be allowed to extend beyond the third presbytery meeting from which that church was first seated—that is, two years after their first seating as a candidate church - unless a two-thirds vote by presbytery to override and extend the status beyond two years occurs.
- N. When a church joins the CREC, the existing ordination of all its officers is thereby accepted, and does not necessitate a formal examination as with other candidates. Nevertheless, observations and questions concerning elder qualifications may occur in the discussion of that church's potential admission.

Article IV. The Broader Assemblies

A. General Provisions

1. There are two broader assemblies in the CREC: the Presbytery and the Church Council. A minimum of two local churches is necessary to establish a presbytery. Geographical boundaries of presbyteries may overlap, but in considering this, presbyteries are urged to remember the Golden Rule (Matt. 7:12; 3 John 9).
2. The authority of the broader assemblies of the CREC is set forth in various parts of this Constitution. The assemblies shall only deal with ecclesiastical matters in an ecclesiastical manner and hence their authority includes the following powers:
 - a) to hold regular and ad hoc meetings;
 - b) to amend their standards following due process;
 - c) to designate ad hoc committees;
 - d) to address matters referred to them by the session of a member church or by another CREC broader assembly;
 - e) to formulate plans of action concerning matters common to the churches;
 - f) to admit new churches into membership;
 - g) to evaluate men for ordination (see BOP XI & Appendix B).
 - h) to inquire into the spiritual health of member churches and to confer with other assemblies to this end;
 - i) to offer a timely pastoral voice to public issues of common concern;
 - j) to mediate in situations wherein a local church's session is at an impasse and when a local church's session is a party in a dispute either with one of its own members, with the session of another CREC church, with a CREC broader assembly, or with a non-CREC church;
 - k) to require mediation and non-binding arbitration, when appropriate, in order to reconcile brothers;
 - l) to protect its own purity and peace through judicial action following due process;
 - m) to censure or expel a member church following due process;
 - n) by two-thirds majority vote and pending judicial process, censure a member church or a CREC officer. A censure under this provision does not affect a member church's voting rights or appeal rights in the broader assemblies.
3. No broader assembly may own property. All property within the CREC will be owned by the local congregations. General costs associated with hosting a broader assembly will be borne by the host church of the broader assembly. Specific costs (e.g. food and travel) will be borne by the delegates or sending churches.
4. The assemblies may form no standing committees or boards. Every committee must be *ad hoc* and automatically dissolve when it completes its assigned task, or submits its assigned report to the assembly. Assigned tasks may not be open-ended, allowing for *de facto* standing committees.
5. All retirement or pension plans for CREC ministers, teachers, missionaries, etc. will be under the authority, management and oversight of the local churches, and will not be the responsibility of the broader assemblies.
6. Books of Procedures
 - a) The broader assemblies shall keep a Book of Procedures that details particular methods for carrying out the various constitutionally-sanctioned tasks of an assembly. The broader assemblies are informed by the Book of Procedures, but not bound to it. Should an assembly act in exception to the Book of Procedures, the exception must be acknowledged and explained in the minutes. The Book of Procedures may be altered or amended at any time by a simple majority of an assembly. The various presbyteries may modify their respective Books of Procedures between meetings of council. Each meeting of council will review these various modifications and harmonize the various Books of Procedures, in accordance with the provisions of

the CREC Council Book of Procedures. Presbyteries may then approve further modifications for their own use, to be followed in turn by conciliar review. Maintenance and publication of a current Book of Procedures is the responsibility of the Presiding Minister.

b) The Book of Procedures maintained by each Presbytery will utilize a standardized format, based upon the CREC Council Book of Procedures, with local practice set out separately by Article. The portion of the Presbytery Books of Procedure that is based upon the CREC Council Book of Procedures will be updated in conformity with the Council Book of Procedures as it is updated.

c) Each Presiding Minister of Presbytery will ensure that the numbering of the Book of Procedures he is responsible for maintaining is consistent with the Council Book of Procedures, which will require the renumbering of Articles which appear only on a local basis.

7. Assemblies may from time to time address issues not included in the historic creeds and confessions by means of overtures, memorials (see Article IX), or confessional statements.

B. Representation

1. Each congregation in a presbytery will send up to two elders as voting representatives to each meeting of presbytery—ordinarily, one of whom is serving in the capacity of pastor if such exists in the local church. A voting representative of a congregation must be a member of that congregation, unless an exception is granted by presbytery.

2. The various presbyteries will each send an equal number of delegates to council, not including the Presiding Minister of Council among the number sent from his presbytery. Each council shall determine the number of delegates that will represent the presbyteries to the subsequent council; the number will be so determined as to create a council of between ten and eighteen delegates in all, not including the Presiding Minister of Council. If there are more than nine presbyteries, each presbytery will be represented at council with two delegates. Delegates to Council are to be elected at the first meeting of Presbytery following a regular meeting of Council, and at any subsequent stated meeting of presbytery at the discretion of presbytery. Each Presiding Minister of Presbytery shall maintain a current roster of Council delegates from that presbytery. Elected Council delegates must also be seated as Presbytery delegates during the same year as the Council meeting.

C. Work and Authority of the Presiding Minister

1. Broader Assemblies will elect a Presiding Minister from their assembled delegates when that office is vacant. In the event that no more than one Council delegate is willing or able to serve or is nominated as Presiding Minister of Council, the assembled presbytery delegates also shall be eligible for nomination as Presiding Minister of Council.

2. The Presiding Ministers of Presbytery and Council serve three-year terms. They assume authority and responsibilities following adjournment of the assembly meeting at which they are elected, which concludes the term of their predecessor.

3. All nominations for the position of Presiding Minister should be pre-posted on the agenda. If no nominations are received prior to the posting of the agenda, nominations may be made from the floor of the assembly. Upon the establishment of a new presbytery, Council shall assign a year to begin the three-year rotation for the election of the Presiding Minister of that presbytery. The presbytery shall have the discretion to have its first Presiding Minister serve one or two additional years in order to meet this rotation requirement.

4. Term limitation

- a) No Presiding Minister of Presbytery may serve two consecutive terms as Presiding Minister unless no qualified candidate is willing to serve (1 Peter 5:1–4). In such cases a two-thirds vote can extend the term of the current Presiding Minister.
 - b) The Presiding Minister of Council may be elected to a second consecutive term by a two-thirds vote of Council. A Presiding Minister of Council may not be elected to a third consecutive term unless the Council determines by a three-fourths majority that the circumstances are extraordinary.
5. Each Presiding Minister must be concurrently serving as a member of the local session. If a Presiding Minister ceases to serve in such a local office, then his term as Presiding Minister ceases at that time. Before his term is completed, a Presiding Minister may resign his position, or he may be removed by a three-fourths vote of the assembly.
6. Presiding Ministers *pro tempore*
 - a) Assemblies shall also elect a Presiding Minister *Pro Tempore*, to serve in cases of the Presiding Minister's absence, or to fill out the term of the Presiding Minister if the office of Presiding Minister becomes vacant.
 - b) When Council elects a Presiding Minister *Pro Tempore*, he shall also serve as Assistant to the Presiding Minister of Council.
7. Presiding Ministers properly act on behalf of the broader assemblies when actions have been declared in writing by the Presiding Minister and then included in that Minister's written report to the next duly constituted meeting of the broader assembly. At the meeting, the Presiding Minister's report must be received and acted upon by the broader assembly in accordance with the procedure described in the Meeting Protocols.
8. With regard to meetings, the Presiding Ministers of Presbytery and Council have the following authority and responsibilities: to prepare agendas, chair the meetings, submit reports of their work, call *ad hoc* meetings when necessary, and prepare minutes of the meetings to be posted in public. In addition, the Presiding Minister of Church Council shall bear the responsibility for maintaining a true and accurate copy of the CREC Constitution, reflecting all amendments and additions thereto, and for making the Constitution available by means of electronic publishing.
9. The Presiding Minister of Presbytery and Council is also a spokesman and representative, whose authority and responsibilities in that capacity are as follows:
 - a) First, between meetings of the broader assembly, the Presiding Minister represents the broader assembly by initiating and taking prudent steps in furtherance of an action, which he must report to the broader assembly for ratification. In this way, the Presiding Minister represents the broader assembly for any action empowered to that assembly by this constitution, except for the following: admitting members; amending confessional or governmental standards; making formal recommendations (whether for or against) ministerial candidates for ordination; removing a member church; requiring arbitration; and adjudicating a trial.
 - b) Second, as representative of Presbytery or Council, the Presiding Minister has the authority to encourage and spiritually strengthen the sessions of elders within his broader assembly, meet with the Presiding Ministers of other broader assemblies, both within and without the CREC, to encourage them or to be encouraged, and to inquire about the spiritual and doctrinal health of other broader assemblies as well as the churches within his own assembly.
 - c) Third, Presiding Ministers are to act according to the authority conferred to them by virtue of their office and all their actions are to be confined and limited to the authority specified by the Constitution of the CREC and they shall report to Presbytery or Council on their work as spokesman and representative. Additionally, prior to a Presiding Minister censuring a CREC church or officer he must receive approval from two other Presiding Ministers.

- d)** Fourth, Presiding Ministers have the discretion and authority to appoint assistants, clerks, or, when the Presiding Minister *Pro Tempore* is not available, chairmen of assemblies, on a case-by-case basis.

D. Referrals, Appeals and Complaints

1. Finality of local church decisions.

Issues relating to the local congregation which may lawfully be brought before the broader assemblies are specified in this section. Except in the case of referrals, appeals, or complaints authorized and accepted under this section, all local church decisions are final and may not be reviewed by the broader assemblies (Presbytery or Council). Nothing in this section prevents local churches from seeking, or the broader assemblies from offering, informal counsel and advice. To the contrary, it is strongly encouraged as the best way of avoiding needless appeals and referrals.

2. Referrals.

A referral is a written request by a local church Session or any member of the Session or a regional Presbytery asking a broader assembly (Presbytery or Council, as the case may be) to accept jurisdiction for deciding a matter that would normally be decided by the more local assembly. Normally, all matters should be handled at the local church level. However, should a local church Session or any of its members, or subsequently a Presbytery, determine that the matter implicates the policies or reputation of a broader assembly, or that it otherwise justifies the consideration of a broader assembly, the more local assembly or any member of a church Session or Presbytery may refer the matter to the broader assembly. All referrals should be sent to the Presiding Minister of the broader assembly. The Presiding Minister may, subject to approval of the broader assembly, exercise discretion to accept jurisdiction over the matter. The Presiding Minister may subsequently, subject to approval of the broader assembly, remand the matter to the more local assembly.

3. Appeals.

a) Definition: An appeal is an action brought by a person or persons who are or were members of a local CREC congregation (including mission congregations), against whom a formal action has been taken by a CREC court and who are aggrieved by such formal action. It constitutes a request for removal of jurisdiction from one court to the next higher court.

b) Any member or former member of a CREC church shall possess a right of appeal regarding judicial actions of which he may be or was the subject. All matters must be adjudicated at the level of the local church before an appeal may be made. An appeal is normally filed with the Presbytery of which the local congregation is a member. However, an appeal may be made directly to Council. In such a case, the Presiding Minister of Council may, in his sole discretion, remand the case to the Presbytery from which it arises. At the conclusion of the matter at the Presbytery level, either party retains the right to make further appeal to Council.

c) The broader assemblies, through the Presiding Minister, must refuse to hear frivolous or unconstitutional appeals. He is also free to deny an appeal if the appellant has overtly discredited himself in his manner of bringing the appeal or the judicial action appealed resulted in harmless error.

d) A simple majority of the Court is necessary to decide the issue on behalf of Council; the decision of Council shall be considered settled and binding unless and until it is found by a future Council to be in conflict with the Scripture or the Constitution of the CREC. Decisions of Council may be appealed to a future Council, though the future Council is not obligated to hear such an appeal.

4. Complaints.

a) Definition: A complaint is a request for a judicial decision to be made against a current CREC individual member or assembly on a charge that has not been adjudicated either because the local assembly refused to

hear the case, the local assembly resolved the case without formal action, the local assembly is one of the parties charged, or the complainant is from outside the CREC.

- b)** Complaints against individuals must be first addressed at the local church level. If the matter is resolved by a formal action of the Session, the right of appeal as set forth in Subsection 3 may be invoked. If formal action has been taken by a CREC assembly the matter is an appeal not a complaint.
 - c)** A complaint against a CREC assembly may not be brought except on the testimony of two or three witnesses. To be considered separate testimony, the witnesses may not be husband and wife.
 - d)** A complaint against the Session of a local church may be brought to a court above the local level only under the following circumstances:
 - i. when the Session of elders is accused of participating in or tolerating grievous dishonesty in subscription to the doctrinal or constitutional standards of the local church; or
 - ii. when the Session of elders is accused of gross misbehavior.
 - e)** When accusations of grievous dishonesty or gross misbehavior on the part of the Session of a local church are made to or from other local churches or presented to the Presiding Minister of Presbytery or Council, the Session under accusation must be promptly informed. However, irresponsible accusations must be rejected and the member making the complaint should be directed back to his own Session.
 - f)** If a complaint is brought against a CREC assembly by someone who is not a member of a CREC church, the CREC, in Presbytery, Council, or through its appropriate Presiding Minister, can agree to hear the case if all of the following conditions have been met:
 - i. The Presiding Minister has established that one or more of the conditions in IV.D.4.a applies.
 - ii. The Presiding Minister has established that the government of the church where the complainant is a member affirms the truth of the Apostles' Creed, and is willing to give due weight, respect and consideration to the decision of the CREC.
 - iii. The charges as framed have two or three available and accountable witnesses listed for each specified complaint. To be considered separate testimony, the witnesses may not be husband and wife.
 - iv. The complainant and his church have not overtly discredited themselves in the manner of bringing the charges.
 - g)** The broader assemblies must refuse to hear frivolous or unconstitutional complaints. Complaints presented to Council do not necessarily have to be first heard by Presbytery. However, Council, acting in Session or through the Presiding Minister, may choose to remand the case to Presbytery.
- 5.** The decisions of the assemblies with regard to the local congregation are spiritually authoritative. If the elders of a particular congregation choose to refuse the instruction of the broader church, the congregation may do so without deprivation of property. However, if their disregard of godly counsel is particularly egregious, the congregation may be removed from membership in the CREC, in accordance with constitutional procedure.
- 6.** After a fair and open hearing at Presbytery, a congregation may be removed from membership in the Presbytery by a two-thirds vote of the Presbytery. Upon such occasions, the removed congregation retains the full right of appeal to Council.

Article V. Meeting Protocols

- A.** The Presbytery will have at least one stated annual meeting. If two-thirds of the churches submit a written request to the Presiding Minister, an *ad hoc* presbytery meeting will be called. The decision to call for an *ad hoc* meeting of the Presbytery cannot be made at Presbytery.
- B.** The Council will have a stated meeting every three years. In the year that Council meets, Presbyteries must have their annual meeting at the same place and time. If two thirds of the Presbyteries submit a written request to the Presiding Minister of Council, an *ad hoc* Council meeting can be called. The decision to call for an *ad hoc* meeting of Council cannot be made at Council. The requirement that Presbyteries convene at the same place and time as Council does not apply to *ad hoc* meetings of Council.
- C.** At stated meetings of the broader assemblies, a delegate may not be counted to establish a quorum if he is not physically present at the meeting. Delegates may participate in discussion by telephone, video conference, or other electronic communication, but may neither make motions nor vote on them. Nothing in this section applies to *ad hoc* meetings of the broader assemblies, which may be conducted by telephone or video conference, or other electronic communication.
- D.** Acts of the Broader Assemblies
 - 1.** Broader assemblies act properly when
 - a)** In a duly constituted meeting, the measure is moved, seconded, carried by the appropriate number of votes, entered in the minutes, and approved in the minutes; or
 - b)** An action is declared in writing by the Presiding Minister and then included in that Minister's written report to the next duly constituted meeting of the broader assembly. At the meeting, the Presiding Minister's report must be received by the broader assembly, his actions reviewed and voted upon, and either approved or disapproved, with the results recorded as such in the approved minutes.
 - c)** Actions of the Presiding Minister of Council on behalf of Council reported to all and approved by two-thirds of Presbyteries shall be deemed as approved by the CREC Council. When two-thirds of the Presbyteries ratify an action or adopt a report, it will be considered an act of Council. The Constitution and Confessional Standards cannot be altered or modified by this means.
 - d)** Upon approval by a three-fourths vote of Council, a Council Committee may recommend actions to all the Presbyteries for a vote at their next stated Presbytery meeting. If three-fourths of the Presbyteries pass the recommended action, it shall be considered an action of Council.
- E.** At votes of the broader assemblies, each delegate has one vote. The Presiding Minister may not vote, and so in those cases when a church has only one vote because one of its delegates has been elected Presiding Minister, the church may put forth a new delegate to take the place of the Presiding Minister. If the church cannot put forth a replacement, the remaining delegate has two votes. This rule shall apply only in a situation when a church cannot field a second delegate while the church's officer is serving as Presiding Minister of a broader assembly because the church lacks a sufficient number of installed officers to field a second delegate. It may not be used to give a single delegate a second vote if another officer of the church is installed but elects, for whatever reason, not to attend a meeting. If a newly elected Minister is needed to step into the chair during the meeting at which he is elected, his church's remaining delegate may have two votes at that meeting, notwithstanding the provisions of the previous two sentences in this section.
- F.** Amending the agenda in stated meetings requires a two-thirds majority vote. The agenda for *ad hoc* meetings may include only those issues related to the stated reasons for calling the meeting.
- G.** The agenda of any stated Presbytery or Council meeting must be posted on the public electronic page maintained by that assembly's Presiding Minister no less than thirty days and no more than sixty days prior to the meeting.

- H.** Full minutes of all the assembly proceedings will be kept. The public minutes and records of the assembly will be published on a public electronic page maintained by the church of the Presiding Minister, with that Minister responsible for its contents. The Presiding Ministers shall ensure that approved minutes and current versions of the Books of Procedures for all Presbyteries and Council and of the CREC Constitution shall be available on the CREC web page. When revised, these documents shall be posted on or linked to the CREC web page within thirty days of their revision. Whenever new presbyteries are formed, the responsibility for the archives of the predecessor presbyteries remains with the new presbyteries having the same name. Minutes of confidential proceedings will be distributed in hard copy to all the member churches in the Presbytery. The costs associated with this process will be borne by the church of the Presiding Minister. Minutes must be posted within two weeks of their approval.
- I.** The minutes of the broader assemblies will be approved after the Presiding Minister has circulated a draft following the adjournment of the assembly, and has allowed reasonable opportunity for revision. The minutes require a two-thirds majority to be approved, and lack of response from a delegate will be considered an affirmative vote. The Presiding Minister will oversee this process of finalizing assembly minutes within sixty days.
- J.** The quorum for the Church Council will be two thirds of the voting delegates. The quorum for a Presbytery will be representation by two-thirds of the member churches in the Presbytery.
- K.** Setting time limits for floor debate or moving the previous question requires a two-thirds vote.
- L.** The broader assemblies have the authority to call for an executive session at their discretion by a simple majority vote.
- M.** The voting status of new member churches shall begin the next presbytery meeting following their acceptance into membership. The delegates can make motions but cannot vote.
- N.** A simple majority of an assembly may seat candidate and visiting delegations along with delegations of mission churches. Such delegations are encouraged to come as observers and friends, or as prospective members of the CREC. Such delegations may not vote, although they may address the assembly at the invitation of the Presiding Minister. They may not participate in debate without unanimous consent of the assembled delegates.
- O.** A visiting delegation of a church, forming church, or interested group may be seated at the discretion of the Presiding Minister. Such seating is not part of the process of joining the CREC. Visiting delegations may not participate in the debates of the assembly.

Article VI. Missions

- A.** All supported international or domestic CREC missionaries will not be sent by the Presbyteries or Church Council, but rather by the local church. As appropriate, the other churches in the Presbytery can offer encouragement and financial support, but the accountability of the missionaries will only be to the congregation, which is the sending body. As circumstances warrant, missionaries may seek a transfer of the sending authority from one local church to another, with the details to be worked out between the missionary and the elders of the respective congregations involved.
- B.** Unless commissioned by, sent by, or ministering under the authority of a member church, individuals or ministries shall not be considered foreign missionaries or missions of the CREC.

Article VII. Confessional Standards and Revision

- A.** The CREC holds as its foundational confession of faith the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon. These confessions are included in Article X of this document.
- B.** The CREC holds generally to the system of doctrine reflected in the great creeds, catechisms, and confessions of the Reformation, and consequently requires all confederated churches to hold to at least one of the particular statements listed in Article III.C.

- C. Revisions to any portion of these confessions of faith must have a first reading at a stated meeting of the Church Council, and may then be brought to a vote at the subsequent stated meeting. Three quarters of the Presbyteries are required to propose revisions to the confession of faith. Such proposed revisions will be placed on a list of potential revisions maintained by the Presiding Minister, to await consideration at the appointed time.
- D. Three quarters of the Presbyteries may remove proposed revisions to the confession of faith at any time prior to the Council when they are to be voted on. A proposed change in the confession requires a three quarters majority in order to pass. This process of revision applies only to the confessional statements, and not to other portions of this constitution.
- E. If a church's standing in the CREC is potentially affected by the process of confessional revision, that church has five years within which to make its first appeal to Presbytery.

Article VIII. Amendments

- A. This Constitution of the CREC, excluding the article containing the confessions of faith, may be amended at any time by a three quarters majority at any regularly scheduled meeting of the Church Council, which includes properly scheduled *ad hoc* meetings.

Article IX. Memorials

- A. Memorials state the position of the CREC on issues on which a confessional statement has not been made. Memorials are contained in the Book of Memorials and are incorporated by reference into this Constitution.
- B. A candidate or mission church must declare any exceptions or reservations to the memorials prior to its becoming a CREC member. Member churches must immediately notify the broader assembly of any changes to their position on the memorials. If Presbytery determines that the exceptions or reservations place the church at odds with CREC standards, it may initiate proceedings according to Article IV. D. 5.
- C. The process for adopting a memorial must involve a careful striving for like-mindedness. This deliberate process will help us guard against various fads and winds of doctrine (Eph. 4:14). Any new memorial must be approved as a draft at a stated Council and adopted at a subsequent stated Council.

Article X. The Ecumenical Creeds

A. **The Apostles' Creed (2nd century)**

I/We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin, Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hades; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into Heaven; and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I/We believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

B. **Nicene Creed; Constantinople (381 AD)**

I/We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin, Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into Heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father;

and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the living and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I/we believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets. And I/we believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church; I/we acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I/we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

C. Definition of Chalcedon (451 AD)

Therefore, following the holy fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the virgin, the God-bearer; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence, not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the fathers has handed down to us.

Article XI. Reformed Evangelical Confession

(1) A Westminster Creed (A modern selection from the 17th century Shorter Catechism)

I believe man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever;

I believe God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth;

I believe there is but one true and living God; that there are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory;

I believe God has foreordained whatever comes to pass; that God made all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good; and that God preserves and governs all His creatures and all their actions.

I believe our first parents, though created in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, sinned against God, by eating the forbidden fruit; and that their fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery;

I believe God determined, out of His mere good pleasure, to deliver His elect out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer;

I believe the only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever;

I believe Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the office of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king.

I believe Christ as our Redeemer underwent the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, the cursed death of the cross, and burial; He rose again from the dead on the third day, ascended up into heaven, sits at the right hand of God, the Father, and is coming to judge the world at the last day.

I believe we are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit;

I believe God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance unto life to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin;

I believe by His free grace we are effectually called, justified, and sanctified, and gathered into the visible church, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation;

I believe that we also are given in this life such accompanying benefits as assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end; that at death, we are made perfect in holiness, and immediately pass into glory; and our bodies, being still united in Christ, rest in their graves, till the resurrection; and at the resurrection, we shall be raised up in glory, we shall openly be acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

(2) An Evangelical Statement (Adapted from the National Association of Evangelicals)

We *believe* the Bible to be the only inerrant Word of God. It is our only ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice.

We *believe* that there is one God, eternally existent in three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is omnipotent, that is, He is all-powerful. He is omnipresent, that is, He is present throughout all Creation but not limited by it. He is omniscient, that is, nothing is hidden from His sight. In all things He is limited by nothing other than His own nature and character.

We *believe* the God we serve is holy, righteous, good, severe, loving and full of mercy. He created the heavens and earth, and everything in them, in the space of six ordinary days, and all very good. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Governor of everything that has been made.

We *believe* in the true deity and full humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father and in His personal return in power and glory.

We *believe* in the full deity of the Holy Spirit, acknowledging Him together with the Father and the Son in the works of creation and redemption.

We *believe* that because of Adam's sin all mankind is in rebellion against God. For the salvation of such lost and sinful men, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary.

We *believe* that salvation is by grace through faith alone, and that faith without works is dead.

We *believe* in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

We *believe* in the resurrection of both the saved and lost; those who are saved to the resurrection of life, and those who are lost to the resurrection of damnation. We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Article XII. Other Confessional Statements

A. Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender and Marriage

1. We confess that the church is subject to Christ, who is Lord over all. 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. With these truths in view, we declare the church's right to reject any attempts on the part of the state to impose on her institutionally or her members individually unbiblical, unnatural definitions of marriage or sexuality.

2. God created man male and female in the beginning for this very reason, that they might be joined together in the covenant of marriage as one flesh (Mark 10:5ff). 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).

3. We resist and reject all attempts to redefine marriage to include same-sex partnerships. Certainly, we desire to serve and love persons with homosexual desires or who engage in homosexual practices. 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 endorse 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.

4. We claim the right for our churches and church members (whatever their particular vocation) to refuse to host, officiate, or in any way support same-sex “marriage” ceremonies, not out of animus, but out of love for God, neighbor, and truth. Likewise, we refuse to host, officiate, or support other ceremonies that violate biblical teaching on marriage.

5. We reject transgenderism as a perversion of God’s good creational order. There are only two sexes, male and female (Gen. 1:26-28). Sex is not fluid, it is binary. We reject the notion that gender is determined by one’s feelings or is detachable from biological and bodily givens. God forms each person genetically as a distinct male or female from the moment of conception. As God is the Creator, and makes each of us either male or female, we cannot unmake and remake ourselves into the opposite sex. Sex is an immutable feature of our identity as creatures; thus, it is impossible for anyone to change his or her sex.

6. Gender dysphoria should not be used to create a protected class of persons, in which one’s feelings override the facts of biology, or in which the rights, dignity, and privacy of transgender persons override the rights, dignity, and privacy of others. Thus, we claim for our churches and church members (in whatever vocation they serve) the right to reject compliance with any public policies or laws that would require us to deny binary sexes, or to accept claims of gender identity that are contrary to one’s God- assigned biology. We reject the legal redefinitions of sex and gender that divorce either of these realities from God-given biology. We claim the right to speak to people according to their God-given sex, rather than reinforcing gender dysphoric confusions by using alternative pronouns. We claim the right to restrict access to intimate facilities (e.g., bathrooms, nursing areas, shelters, etc.), to sex-specific events, etc., strictly according to God-given biological realities. In the case of someone who has already transitioned to the appearance of the opposite sex, the session of the local congregation will determine the wisest and most compassionate course of action.

7. All sexual sins can be forgiven through the shed blood of Christ, including the practice of sodomy and transgenderism. But forgiveness can never be separated from confession and repentance; forgiveness can never be separated from denying oneself and taking up the cross daily; forgiveness can never be separated from fighting against sin and pursuing holiness in the power of the Holy Spirit.