

Grace Reformed Church of Weiser

*Jesus Christ ... the King of kings and Lord of lords ... 1Tim 5:14-15
In the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise. Heb 2:12*

CONSTITUTION

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ARTICLE I PURPOSE

1. In the church of God all things are to be done decently and in order (1Cor 14.40). This 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 us, we seek to obey Scripture through the following standards for the orderly and scriptural government of our local church, Grace Reformed Church of Weiser, Idaho. These standards do not supplant Scripture, but rather are expressions of our understanding of biblical church government under God. While seeking to be biblical in structure, we make no claim that every detail found here is expressly taught by Scripture. These standards are primarily procedural; the doctrinal positions of our church may be found in the Confession of Faith, The Westminster Confession (1646).
2. The purpose of our church is to glorify God through submission to His Word in sincere, reverent covenant renewal worship, in proclaiming the Kingship of Jesus Christ and His grace to sinners, in building up the saints through doctrinal and applicatory preaching of the whole counsel of God, in faithful observance of Christ's sacraments, and in obedient, loving, and unified body life. Our intention is to submit to all principles of church order which are expressly required in Scripture or which by good and necessary consequence can be deduced therein. Beyond that, we desire to operate in terms of a sanctified Christian prudence, with all things done in good order and with 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 (Psalm 133; Eph 4.3, 13).

ARTICLE II CONFESSION OF FAITH

3. Our Confession of Faith expresses an important part of who we are as a church. We confess and believe together with our fathers in the faith and our brethren throughout the world. We are baptized into their company as members of the same body, the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with them we eat of a common loaf and drink from a common cup. Their creed is our creed, even as their life is our life—one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. The elders of Grace Reformed Church of Weiser, as a means of identifying with the broader Church, subscribe to the Apostles' Creed (AD 2nd century), the Nicene Creed (AD 381), and the Definition of Chalcedon (AD 451), and express their substantial agreement with the historic confessions of the Protestant Reformation (the 39 Articles of Religion, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of

Dordt), holding those creeds and confessions to be faithful witnesses and summaries of what the Scriptures teach; and the elders further subscribe to the particular statement of faith as set out in Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646, with the following exceptions:

- (a) 1. Chapter 7: Of God's Covenant with Man— Para . 2: (cf. Chp. 19, para. 1, 6). We would clarify that the "covenant of works" was not meritorious and we deny that any covenant can be kept without faith. Good works, even in this covenant were a result of faith, as illustrated by the Sabbath rest which was Adam's first full day in the presence of God.
2. Chapter 21: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day— Para . 8: We believe that along with works of piety, necessity, and mercy, the command also calls us to rest our bodies on the Sabbath (Gen. 2:2-3; Ex. 16:30 ; 31:15-17). We do not believe the intention of Scripture was to exclude recreation, especially in the context of the fellowship of God's people.
3. Chapter 23: Of the Civil Magistrate— Para. 3: "[The Civil Magistrate] has power to call synods, to be present at them and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God." The final phrase gives the Civil Magistrate authority over spiritual matters, which in essence is a form of Erastianism.
4. Chapter 24: Of Marriage— Para. 4: Delete the last sentence, which reads, "The man may not marry any of his wife's kindred, nearer in blood than he may of his own: nor the woman of her husband's kindred, nearer in blood than of her own."
5. Chapter 25: Of the Church— Para. 6: Though we believe the Pope of Rome can be anti-Christian, we do not believe him necessarily to be the Anti-Christ, Man of Lawlessness, or Beast of Revelation, etc.
6. Chapter 27: Of the Sacraments— Para. 4: Ministers of the Word should ordinarily lead in the administration of the Sacraments, yet we believe that it is permissible for the sacraments to be administered with the oversight of any elder, lawfully ordained.
7. Chapter 28: Of Baptism— Para. 3: We believe that the proper modes of baptism include sprinkling, pouring, and immersion. Para. 4: Being a church composed of both paedobaptists and those holding to believer's baptism, we expressly allow men otherwise qualified to serve as elders, but who hold to believer's baptism, to make an exception to WCF XXVIII. 4, which states, "Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized."
8. Chapter 29: Of The Lord's Supper— Para. 7: We would clarify that "worthy receivers" of the Lord's Supper should include all baptized covenant members who are able to physically eat and drink the elements, including very young children being raised in the discipline and admonition of the Lord (provided that they are not under discipline). We deny that an artificial standard of age or mental capacity is consistent with the Biblical basis for partaking of the Supper. We defer to the heads of households in discerning the capacity of their young children to partake in the Supper.

ARTICLE III MEMBERSHIP

4. Intent. These provisions are designed solely for the purpose of maintaining scriptural and accountable local church government, such that our affairs are conducted biblically, decently, and in order (1 Cor 14.40; Heb 13.17). Our membership protocol is not intended and should not be construed in such a way as to disrupt our Christian unity and fellowship with true saints who attend church elsewhere (Gal 3.28; 1 Cor 3.1-4).
5. Membership in General. Membership is by individual and includes baptized children under the age of 20. An individual is eligible for membership when (1) they reside in our geographic region, (2) they have been lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Mat 28.19), (3) they have not contradicted their profession through their manner of life (Mat 7.22-23), and (4) they have taken the membership vows, (Philemon 2; Heb 13.7, 17). The elders will discuss membership and review the church's doctrine and practice with all who apply. Our membership vows consist of affirmative responses to the following questions:
1. Have you acknowledged yourself to be a sinner in need of the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ?

2. Have you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting and resting in Him alone, as He was offered in the gospel?
3. Have you been baptized in accordance with His Word?
4. Are you resolute, in humble reliance upon the help of God, in endeavoring daily to live as a follower of Christ?
5. Do you promise to support this church in its worship and work, and to submit yourself to the government, discipline, and teaching of this church, pursuing its purity and peace?

When these vows have been taken, the congregation will be 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 own membership vows as you do so?

6. **Children.** Membership for children of members begins when each child is baptized. Children in member households who have been baptized and have come to the Lord's Table are communicant members of the church. Children in member households who have been baptized but have not come to the Lord's Table are non-communicant members of the church. Children in member households who have not been baptized are recognized by the elders as non-communicant members.
7. **Administering the Sacraments.** 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 in particular and of the parents in general. Any baptized child may partake of the Lord's Table. Heads of household in particular and parents in general are responsible for instructing their children in the meaning and significance of the Lord's Supper on a regular basis.
8. **Special Cases.** In special cases, individuals who attend regularly may be received into non-voting membership or may come under our pastoral care without coming into membership.
9. **Electors.** When matters are put to a vote, or when the opinion of the congregation is officially sought by the elders, the voting or registering of official opinion is done by all who have taken membership vows.
10. **Transferring to Another Church.** If a member household or individual member requests to be released to the care of another Christian church, the elders will normally release them with a blessing. If a member requests to be released following an offense which may qualify for formal discipline, whether committed by that member or someone in their household, the elders will normally delay acting on the request until they resolve the disciplinary matter, determine that formal discipline is not warranted, or determine that the disciplinary matter can and should be passed on to the gaining church. If members move from our geographical area, they are charged to find a new church home within six months. This period may be extended at the elders' discretion. After this period is expired, they are released from membership.

ARTICLE IV CHURCH OFFICERS

11. **Duties of Elders.** Under Christ, the authority of the local church is the board of elders or presbyters in session (Act 15.4-22; 20.28; Heb 13.17; 1Pet 5.1-4). The elders are collectively responsible to oversee the following:
 - (a) Shepherding (1Pet 5.1-2).
 - (b) Equipping (Eph 4.11-12).
 - (c) Prayer / fasting (Acts 6.4; 13.1-3).
 - (d) Teaching / preaching (1Tim 5.17).
 - (e) Ruling (Hebrews 13:17).
 - (f) Administering baptism and the Lord's Table (Matt 28.19-20; 1Cor 11.23-26).

- (g) Administering church discipline and restoration (1Cor 5.1-5).
- (h) Prayer for the healing of the sick (James 5.14-15).
- (i) Delegating responsibilities to the deacons, hiring and firing church staff, defining the responsibilities of church staff, and delegating responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries. The elders will approve the annual budget.
- (j) Commissioning or licensing ministerial students, and overseeing the course of their training for the eldership. Under the guidance and oversight of the board of elders, such commissioned individuals will have the opportunity to perform all the various ministerial functions of elders, participation in the rule of the church being the only exception.
- (k) Individual elders are responsible for those duties delegated to them by the elders in session, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard for their gifts, abilities, and desires.

12. Session Meetings. All usual business of the elders will be conducted at their regular meetings or at special meetings called for a particular purpose. In all meetings of the session of presbyters, each elder has one vote. The elders will appoint one of their number to moderate the meetings of the elders (“moderator”), and one to record the minutes of the meetings (“clerk”). Whenever possible, the moderator and clerk will not be an elder who also serves as a pastor or minister of the church.

13. Different Types of Elders. We recognize the following types or categories of elders:

- (a) Ruling Elder: This is the basic office of elder or presbyter, and its basic function is oversight, rule, and shepherding of the congregation, which is a responsibility shared by all elders (Act 15.4-22; 20.28; Heb 13.17; 1Pet 5.1-4).
- (b) Ministering Elder or Pastor: An elder gifted for and called by the Session to the pastoral/pulpit ministry of the Word and Sacraments (Act 6.2; Eph 4.11; 1Tim 5.17-18; Rev 2.1).
- (c) Teaching Elder: An elder gifted for and called by the Session to a didactic ministry of the Word outside the pastorship.

Each elder will have his calling and category acknowledged by the elders in session. In all meetings of the Session, each elder has one vote regardless of their calling or category.

14. Compensation. Elders whose assigned duties preclude them from providing for their families in the ordinary way will be compensated by the church (1Cor 9.7-14; 1 Tim 5.17-18).

15. Adding Ruling or Teaching Elders. Elders will be added to the Session from time to time as circumstances warrant. A man may come to be considered for the office in several ways. He may aspire to the office himself (1Tim 3.1), the elders may approach him, or people of the church may suggest his name to the elders. To consider a man for elder, the Session will examine the man with regard to his doctrine and manner of life. The man must meet the qualifications for the office set down in Scripture (1Tim 3.1-7; Tit 1.5-9; 1Pet 5.2-4) and must disclose without dissembling or equivocation any disagreement or mental reservation regarding any portion of the church's Confession of Faith or Constitution. If a candidate for elder takes exception to the doctrine of household baptism outlined in Article II.3.a.7, the Session will evaluate his willingness to accept all covenant baptisms as valid and to respect and honor the church's position despite his disagreement. The candidate is not required to affirm the doctrine but agree not to publicly teach contrary to the church's stated position. The congregation will be informed of this exception before the congregational vote. If after examination, the elders unanimously believe that the man is qualified and should be considered as a candidate, the elders will consult the congregation to determine whether they support the man for office in light of the biblical qualifications. The Session will carefully consider any objections or reservations expressed. A candidate shall be ordained and installed if (1) he receives a strong consensus of support from the congregation (Phil 2.1-4), and (2) the elders,

after consulting the congregation, maintain their unanimous support regarding the fitness of the man and the desirability of his ordination and installation. A candidate may be ordained and installed in spite of some objection from the congregation, but only if the Session unanimously overrules any serious, substantive objection(s) as being ill-founded or unscriptural. If the candidate is ordained over objection, one or more of the elders will meet with those who objected to discuss the elders' decision. If a candidate for office is rejected, one or more of the elders will meet with him to discuss the process and answer any questions the candidate might have. Once installed, an elder will serve for a term of three years, unless he resigns or is removed before that time. After the three-year term, if the other elders maintain their unanimous support regarding the fitness of the man and the desirability of his continued service, the elders will consult the congregation to determine whether they continue to support the man. If there continues to be a strong consensus of support, and if the other elders maintain their unanimous support after consulting the congregation, the man will be installed for life, unless he subsequently resigns or is removed.

16. Calling or Adding a Pastor/Ministering elder. The rules from para. 15 apply with the following qualifications. The elders must also examine a pastoral candidate regarding his giftedness for preaching (especially in the case of a candidate for senior pastor), teaching, shepherding, doctrine, and manner of life (2Sam 12.1-16; Psalm 23; John 10.11-16; 1Tim 4.13-16). If initially approved by the Session, the candidate must preach before the congregation (in the case of a candidate for senior pastor) and submit to a public interview. A candidate for Pastor must also meet the requirements of the CREC Constitution regarding ordination examination, etc. Ordination and calling to Pastor are for life, unless the man resigns or is removed.
17. Duties of Deacons. Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons will manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church (Acts 6.2-4). Such responsibilities include administering the deacons' fund and almsgiving, preparing and administering the annual budget, building maintenance, fellowship meals, and administration of subordinate ministries. Individual deacons are responsible for those duties assigned to them by the deacons, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts and desires. There is no distinction of rank among the deacons.
18. Deacons' meetings. All usual business of the deacons will be conducted at their regular meetings, or at a special meeting called for a particular purpose. The deacons will appoint one of their number to moderate the meetings of the deacons ("moderator"), and one to record the minutes of the meetings ("clerk"). The deacons will be prepared to give a general report of their work at each regular congregational meeting, they will provide financial report to the church at least bi-annually, and they will give an annual report to the elders with proposals for the upcoming year.
19. Adding Deacons. Deacons shall be added to the Board of Deacons from time to time as circumstances warrant. Consideration of a man for deacon may arise in the same ways as with potential elders, or the Board of Deacons may bring a man to the attention of the Session. The Session will examine a man regarding his doctrine and manner of life in the same manner as with potential elders with the following exceptions: (1) the man must meet the biblical qualifications for deacon (1Tim 3.8-13); (2) if a man is found to be qualified upon examination by the Session, he will be referred to the Board of Deacons as a candidate, and the Board will then include the candidate in its work in order to prove his fitness for the office (1Tim 3.10); (3) if and when the candidate has shown, in the unanimous judgment of the Board of Deacons, his fitness for office, the Board will make a recommendation to the elders that the man be added to the Board; (4) the Session may, if appropriate, conduct a follow-up examination of the man regarding any aspect of his life, doctrine, or fitness for office; (5) if the Session unanimously concurs in the Board's recommendation, the Session will consult with the congregation in the same manner as prescribed for elder candidates; (6) if there is a strong consensus of support, and the Session maintains its unanimous support after consulting the congregation, the Session shall ordain the new deacon to the ministry through the laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 6.6). If a candidate is not approved for ordination, one or more elders will meet with him to discuss the process and answer any questions the candidate might have. Once installed, the deacon will serve for life, unless he resigns, is removed, or takes

another office.

20. Resignation of Elders or Deacons. If an elder or deacon desires to resign his office or take a leave of absence, he will present a letter expressing this desire and explaining his reasons to the session of elders. The elders will notify the members at the next congregational meeting of their receipt of the letter. If the desire of the elder or deacon concerned is unchanged by the following congregational meeting, then the elders will read 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.
21. Removal of Elders and Deacons. If an elder or deacon believes himself to be fit for office, but he is believed to be unfit by two or more believers or else one believer supported by strong circumstantial evidence, the witness or witnesses should request a special session of the elders where they can present their case (1Tim. 5:19). If the elders unanimously decide that the case has merit, they will then determine the appropriate action to take. Depending on the gravity of the charges and the elder's or deacon's response to any correction, the elder or deacon may be rebuked in the presence of the members of the congregation (1Tim. 5:20) and/or removed from office (1Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and/or brought under formal church discipline (with a view to suspension from the Table or excommunication).
22. Removal of Pastors. While Grace Reformed Church of Weiser 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 unrighteous 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., Act 15.33-41; Rom 15.22-33, 1Cor 16.5-12), the procedure for terminating the call of a pastor, thereby dismissing him from service at Grace Reformed Church of Weiser, 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 Grace Reformed Church of Weiser by a unanimous vote of the session (excluding said pastor). In such a case, the pastor may have recourse to the elector households by calling for a vote to either sustain his call as pastor or not (with an option to abstain). If the elector households sustain his call by a two-thirds majority vote, the other elders must afterwards either concede to his call or refer the matter to the CREC for binding arbitration.

ARTICLE V DISCIPLINE

23. Informal Discipline within the Body of Christ. The ordinary course of discipline within the Body of Christ is informal. Accordingly, members are encouraged: (1) to live with godly self-discipline and self-control (Act 24.25; Gal 5.23; 2Pet 1.6; but see Col 2.20-23), (2) to maintain an attitude of reconciliation (Mat 5.23-25), (3) to privately confess to others within the Body when one is aware of an offense one has committed against another (Mat 5.23-24), (4) to exhort and admonish one another unto faithful, thankful, joyful Christian lives (Eph 5.18-20; Col 3.15-17); (5) to overlook the failings of others in love (1Pet 4.8); and (6) to pursue biblical means of addressing personal offenses of the sort that should not or cannot be overlooked (Mat 18.15-17). Informal discipline within the Body requires wisdom. If any member is unsure of the appropriate response in a given situation, they should approach one or more of the elders for advice.
24. Formal Discipline of the Church. Formal discipline of the church, which is what the remainder of this Article pertains to, is applied through the formal action and unanimous judgment of the elders.
25. Life is often complex and difficult. Different people require different kinds of responses in breadth of approach, depth of application, and speed of response. The elders, therefore, reserve the right to exercise wisdom in determining whether, when, and how to exercise discipline in the various situations God brings to their attention (e.g., rebellious older children of ungodly parents, people who decline to take necessary medication,

people who come to us with a history of deep and habitual sin, etc.).

26. Any communicant member of this church may be disciplined by the church. For others (e.g., non-communicant members, unbaptized members of member households, non-members who attend our church regularly), our ability to discipline them is obviously limited, and situations that call for discipline will have to be governed by sanctified wisdom. Non-communicant, baptized members of the church and unbaptized members of member households obviously cannot be suspended or excommunicated from the Lord's Supper, but they are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church and, if warranted, can be put out of the congregation. Christians who attend church regularly, but are non-members, are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church, but not excommunication; however, the elders can refuse to serve them communion, and the elders can also advise them that they are not welcome to attend the church any longer, which are not forms of discipline (Titus 3.10). 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. If a person is being persistently divisive or otherwise harming the congregation, but the circumstances are such that formal discipline is not warranted or cannot be pursued without great difficulty, the elders may tell the person that they are not welcome to attend this church and must attend elsewhere (Titus 3.10).
27. The elders shall establish the specific procedures for all formal discipline on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individual(s) involved. However, except for cases of scandal requiring immediate action, the pattern of church discipline will normally include a clear and timely warning to the individual that he is in the process of formal discipline, an effort to meet or communicate with the person(s) for the purpose of bringing them to repentance, and clear records and/or minutes of these actions.
28. If the elders determine that a hearing is necessary, they will establish the specific procedures for the hearing as appropriate to the circumstances and individual(s) involved. Whenever possible, the accused will be informed in writing of the specific charges and the time, place, and date of the hearing, and will be given ample time to prepare a defense. If appropriate, the heads of households will be informed of the hearing. 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 who testify. A vote of the elders, which may occur at the hearing or at a separate meeting, 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. Whenever possible, the accused will be advised of the verdict in writing. The elders will establish an official file containing all the records pertaining to the hearing, including all pertinent correspondence, transcripts, and minutes. The accused, if he requests it, will be given one copy of this file at the expense of the church.
29. Appeals. Any appeal to Presbytery or Council will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the CREC.
30. Excommunication will end when the elders determine (1) that the one under discipline has repented, or (2) that the excommunication should end based on an adverse ruling on appeal or based on informal advice from Presbytery or Council. In the case where excommunication is being lifted due to repentance, a confession of repentance will be read to the congregation on the Lord's Day, and the elders shall formally announce the end of the discipline and restoration of fellowship.

ARTICLE VI SUBORDINATE MINISTRIES

31. The elders may unanimously delegate to an individual or board the executive authority of any subordinate ministry established by the elders. This executive responsibility continues at the pleasure of the elders. In order to dismiss such an individual, or remove someone from such a board, a two-thirds vote of the active elders is required. Separation of a subordinate ministry from Grace Reformed Church of Weiser may be authorized by a

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

ARTICLE VII INCORPORATION AND AFFILIATION

32. Incorporation. As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Grace Reformed Church of Weiser is not constituted or incorporated by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church. Grace Reformed Church of Weiser maintains its status as an unincorporated church as a matter of conscience. As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Grace Reformed Church of Weiser accepts the various burdens and entanglements of civil regulation and taxation under protest. Grace Reformed Church of Weiser 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 Idaho.
33. Affiliation: Grace Reformed Church of Weiser is a member of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) and accepts all the constitutional requirements that come with that affiliation. This adoption by reference may be stayed or refused by a 3/4 vote of the Grace Reformed Church of Weiser Session, provided the vote takes place within 60 days of the submission of the minutes of the CREC Council which made the constitutional amendment. In order to absolve its affiliation with the CREC, a 3/4 vote of the Grace Reformed Church of Weiser full session is required.
34. Furthermore, Grace Reformed Church of Weiser publicly confesses the following article from the Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender, and Marriage.

A. 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.

B. 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).

C. 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.

D. 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, ARTICLE XII. 35 STATEMENT ON SEX, GENDER, AND MARRIAGE we refuse to host, officiate, or support other ceremonies that violate biblical teaching on marriage.

E. 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.

F. 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.

G. 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.

ARTICLE VIII AMENDMENTS

35. This Constitution may be amended through unanimous consent of the elders after the proposed change has been presented, along with a written copy thereof to all members 20 years of age and older, and the elders seek due consultation with the congregation. Given that this Constitution is a fallible work of fallible men, if obedience to Scripture requires it, a Constitutional provision may be set aside without the process of amendment by the unanimous judgment of the elders. Under such circumstances, the heads of households will be informed, and the constitution amended at the first opportunity.

APPENDIX A.

36. The CREC Constitution is found at <https://crechurches.org/documents/>. Copies are available by request.