

**THE
CONSTITUTION
OF**

COVENANT REFORMED

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

OF PAINESVILLE

Ratified July 21, 1996.
Amended June 18, 2008

CONCERNING THE NAME

The name of this local church will be Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church.

CONCERNING THE PURPOSE

The first purpose of this church is to honor and glorify the Almighty God by obeying His Word. The means of fulfilling of this purpose include:

- a) Consistent, loving prayer;
- b) Encouragement and admonition;
- c) And weekly Sabbath Day corporate meetings of the congregation to worship the Lord with prayer, spiritual song, reading and preaching of the Word, and correct administration of the Sacraments.

This worship is to be in accordance with the Reformed regulative principle. We may worship our holy God only as he has commanded us in Scriptures. All else is forbidden.

The church shall direct and teach its members to fulfill their own personal obligations including: a) loving the Lord with all one's heart,

- b) Worshipping Him,
- c) Evangelizing the lost,
- d) Being salt and light in this society, and
- e) Training their covenant children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

CONCERNING THE AUTHORITY

This church will be governed directly by the Holy Scriptures and secondarily by this constitution. Being given authority by the Holy Spirit, ordained by the Presbytery, and elected by the congregation, the Pastor and other Elders will govern the day-to-day affairs of the church. A Deaconate will be established, when necessary, to take special care in distributing to the needs poor.

CONCERNING THE STATEMENT OF FAITH

Essential doctrines

The following doctrines constitute the essence of the Christian Faith. They are absolute doctrinal requirements for membership. The door to the church must be as wide as the gates of Heaven. These doctrines detail the dividing line between orthodoxy necessary for salvation and damnable heresy leading to the perdition and destruction of the ungodly.

1. We believe the Bible as contained in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments is the inspired and inerrant Word of God, the only rule of faith and obedience.
2. There is one and only one God, This God has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures as a personal being existing eternally in three persons (the divine Trinity): God the Father, God the Son (Jesus Christ), and God the Holy Spirit.
3. We believe the universe was created directly by God.
4. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, begotten of the Father before all worlds, very God of very God, willingly humbled himself in love for mankind, was born of a virgin, fully human. He led a sinless life, died a substitutionary, atoning death on the cross. Three days later he rose bodily from the dead. He ascended into heaven and now intercedes for His brethren on the right hand of His Father. He will one day return bodily to the earth to rule His Kingdom.
5. We believe a person is saved, or justified, by an act of God's free grace and not on any merit of his own. God pardons his sins and accepts him as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (through Christ's substitutionary atoning death and bodily resurrection) and received *sola fidi*, by faith alone.
6. Those who are converted will live eternally in the presence of God and all the redeemed, and those who are not converted will suffer eternal damnation in hell.

Creedal Statements

We hold to the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 as our doctrinal standard. This is the standard maintained by the John Knox Presbyterian Church. In addition, we adhere to its BCO as a means of maintaining order and peace in the Church of Jesus Christ. All officers must uphold and teach these standards. Members are free to

take exception to anything not contrary to the six points of orthodoxy listed above, provided they do not promote dissension.

We believe the ecumenical creeds, the Apostle's Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed and Chalcedonian Creed, are all accurate expressions of biblical orthodoxy.

CONCERNING THE GOVERNMENT

We believe that this local body is a visible manifestation of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, governed by God Almighty. God the Father has given His Son, Jesus Christ, all authority in all things, including the ruling of His people. Therefore, the government of this body must be determined, not by our personal opinions, but by Christ's commands and the examples revealed in His Word. We believe the Scriptures teach that the Church must be governed by a plurality of elders called by God, nominated and ordained by Presbytery and approved by the consenting, majority vote of the people. This Scriptural form of government is called a covenantal or *constitutional republic*. Authority for the establishment of doctrine and practices beyond those found in this constitution and for the daily operation of the church is vested in the Session, the local body of elders.

As part of the one catholic (universal) Church this body recognizes its divinely-mandated responsibility to unite with other local congregations, together comprising the whole body fit together in Christ. This is not an option. It is an explicit command of the Lord that may not be ignored without the most serious repercussions to the well being of the one holy catholic and apostolic body of our Lord.

Nevertheless, because many parts of that body have misinterpreted the scriptural doctrine of church polity this body recognizes the resulting severe differences of make it impossible to join with all other catholic churches at this time. Two cannot walk together unless they agree.

Therefore, we covenant to join with the Presbyterian Church, whose polity we believe to be the Scripturally accurate. Because evangelical Presbyterian churches in the body of Christ are torn by many unlawful schisms, as well, it is not possible for this local body to unite with all Presbyterian churches at the same time. This being the case, in keeping with the commands of our Lord, this body covenants to unite with that body of local Reformed and Presbyterian churches known as the **John Knox Presbyterian Church**. This decision should not be interpreted as denying the orthodoxy of other denominational bodies.

As a member of that Presbyterial union known as the **John Knox Presbyterian Church**, this body recognizes its obligation to submit to the rule and authority of the Presbytery of that denomination. Because the authority of the Presbytery (all of the elders in a specific area or region), over the local congregation is not an option, but a divinely appointed edict, this body has no scriptural right to ignore the instructions of that higher body. Covenant recognizes the General Assembly as the highest governing body in the Church

having authority over both this local Session, and the regional Presbytery. General Assembly may lawfully overturn the decisions of those bodies under its authority.

No other governing bodies may exercise authority over or within this church. Any association with other individuals, churches, or groups of churches outside of the bounds of our Presbyterian affiliation will be considered voluntary. Such relationships may be severed at any time if they are considered in any way harmful to this body.

CONCERNING THE OFFICERS

Elders

The elders are called to shepherd God's flock (the church) and as such must meet all the qualifications outlined for them in Scripture and the BCO of the JKP. All elders are equal in ruling status and authority, though pastors and teachers have additional functions pertinent to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. They must subscribe to the statement of faith found in this constitution and are required to inform the Session of any disagreement with the Standards. The Session will then determine whether the differences should disqualify the elder from holding office.

The elder and his family must practice the holiness and purity that befits a Christian elder and his family. He will be elected to office by a minimum of two-thirds majority vote of the people. His term will be perpetual. In keeping with Scriptures, all elders must be examined, approved, ordained, and installed by a representative body of elders from the Presbytery of the JKP for his appointment to be binding. The office of elder may be terminated only by resignation accepted by Presbytery or the well-considered discretion of Presbytery.

He must be a member in good standing of this local body for a minimum of one year prior to being nominated for the office. This wait will allow him to become familiar with the people and any peculiar circumstance relating to this body. Only under special circumstances, such as a transfer from another orthodox Presbyterian church, may an elder hold the office without waiting that year's time with the approval of Presbytery. Under such circumstances, the elder shall serve this body for one year, after which time the congregation shall vote by a two-thirds majority to accept or reject him as a permanent ruler in this body having had a year to become familiar with him and he with them.

Elders as Pastors:

The Scriptures hold forth the name and title of *pastor*. One or more elders are to be elected by the congregation to be the pastor if and when that elder meets the theological training requirements of the JKP. The office of pastor may be terminated by resignation or the well-considered discretion of the Session. This termination will be subject to an appeal to the local Presbytery in accordance with the BCO of the JKP.

The Duties of Pastors:

- 1) Pray for and with his flock.

- 2) Read the Scriptures publicly.
- 3) Feed the flock by preaching the Word.
- 4) Catechize by plainly laying down the first principles of the oracles of God.
- 5) Dispense other "divine mysteries."
- 6) Administer the sacraments.
- 7) Bless the people from God.
- 8) Take care of the poor.
- 9) Serve as the moderator of the session of the particular congregation.
- 10) Maintain a ruling power over the flock as pastor.

The presiding pastor can delegate duties 1 - 9 to an associate pastor or other elder as the session sees fit. He may not delegate the duty of moderator of session to anyone who has not been elected by the congregation.

Elders as Church Governors

Church governors are equal in authority and position to the pastors of this body. It is in function only that they differ. They work individually and jointly with the pastors on the session in the oversight of this congregation.

The Duties of a Church Governor:

- 1) Open and shut the doors to God's covenant household.
- 2) Organize and call the congregation together for worship and meetings and dismiss them within a reasonable amount of time.
- 3) Prepare matters in private, so that in public they may be conducted with less trouble and greater efficiency.
- 4) Pronounce sentence according to the mind of Christ at the appropriate times with sessional and/or presbyterial approval.
- 5) Be guides and leaders to the congregation.
- 6) Encourage those in the congregation not to live beyond their means, without a calling or vocation, or idly in their vocation.
- 7) Prevent and heal such offenses in life or doctrine as might corrupt the congregation.
- 8) Care for the flock with words of admonition and encouragement.
- 9) As they shall be sent for, to visit and to pray over their sick brethren.
- 10) To pray for all the brethren, especially those in their charge, instruct the ignorant, comfort the mourning, and nourish and guard the children of the covenant.
- 11) They shall have particular concern for the doctrine and conduct of the minister of the Word and help him in his labors.
- 12) Administer the word and sacraments if permitted by the presiding pastor.

Deacons

The Scriptures hold out the office of *deacon* as a distinct officer in the Church. This office has no authority to rule or administer the sacraments, but is to take special care in distributing to the necessities of the poor. All deacons called by the Session to serve Christ's Church must meet the qualifications outlined for them in the Scriptures and the BCO of the JKP. All deacons must subscribe to the statement of faith found in this constitution. They and their families must practice the holiness and purity that befits their calling.

Deacons will be nominated and examined by the Session, elected by a two-thirds majority vote of the congregation, and ordained by the Session. The deacon's office is perpetual.

He must be a member in good standing of this local body for a minimum of one year prior to being nominated for the office. This wait will allow him to become familiar with the people and any peculiar circumstance relating to this body. Only under special circumstances, such as an unusually pronounced area of need or a transfer from another orthodox Presbyterian Church, may a deacon hold the office with the approval of Session without waiting that year's time. Under such circumstances, the deacon shall serve this body for one year, after which time the congregation shall vote by a two-thirds majority to accept or reject him as a permanent deacon in this body having had a year to become familiar with him and he with them.

The Duties of a Deacon:

- 1) Minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless and to any who may be in distress.
- 2) Develop a charitable spirit in the members of the Church, devise effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and distribute these gifts for the purpose for which they were contributed.
- 3) Care for the property of the congregation, both real and personal, and keep in proper repair the church edifice and other buildings belonging to the congregation within the guidelines established by the session.
- 4) Support the elders in their ministry.
- 5) Set an example to other members in matters of spirituality, dedication, and character.

It does not belong to the office of deacon to preach the word, administer the sacraments or regulate the finances of the church. The deaconate may draw up the budget, at the discretion of the session, but only under the supervision and approval of the session. All financial matters are subject to sessional approval. The office of deacon may be terminated by resignation accepted by the session or the well-considered discretion of the session.

Treasurer

The treasurer is not an office found in Scripture, but a position necessary to the normal

day-to-day function of the church. He must live a godly life and possess the abilities to carefully discharge the responsibilities of handling the daily financial transactions of the church. The treasurer will be selected by a two-thirds majority vote of the Session. The treasurer's activities will be subject to the Session. If a treasurer is not available, the session will maintain the finances or may delegate a deacon to hold the office of treasurer.

CONCERNING MEETINGS

The officers of the church are to meet together at convenient and set times, for the well ordering of the affairs of the congregation, each according to his office. It is most expedient that, in these meetings, one whose office is to labor in the word and doctrine, shall moderate in their proceedings. All meetings will be conducted according to the latest edition of *Robert's Rules of Order*. Members of the congregation may not participate in the discussion and voting during these meetings, as they are restricted to those who have been appointed by the people to represent them. A quorum of the Session will consist of a majority of the officers. A quorum for the deaconate will consist of one deacon and the pastor. Issues to be voted on will be clearly presented, ample time will be given for discussion, and the issue will then be voted on. A binding decision will be established by a simple majority vote of the officers present.

CONCERNING MEMBERSHIP

All children born into the household of communicant members of the Covenant are by virtue of their covenantal birthright members of the visible Church of Jesus Christ and the Covenant. Until such time as these children do publicly profess their faith before the congregation and acknowledge allegiance to the gracious covenant of the Lord into which they have been born, they are *non-communicant* members, having not *communicated* their faith to the body. As such they are not to partake of the communion of the Lord until they do acknowledge and discern the Lord's body, lest they eat and drink judgment upon themselves and upon the congregation. "If we would judge ourselves we will not be judged." I Cor. 11

Any individual professing faith in Christ, having been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, may be considered a candidate for communicant membership. The pastor will announce publicly all potential candidates for membership. If any member thinks that a potential candidate may not be qualified for membership, he is strongly urged to inform the session of his opinion.

Any individual who professes their faith in Christ through the ministry of CRPC should be baptized in the next possible worship service as a sign and seal of their initiation into the visible body of Christ. Having been baptized and taken the vows of membership, which vows are the same as those required for baptism, they are accepted in to the visible

body of Christ and as members of CRPC. They should then meet with the session for the three meetings required of all new members and detailed below.

Any prospective member professing faith in Christ prior to approaching CRPC must meet with the session of CRPC a minimum of three times prior to being accepted by the session. The purpose of these meeting is both to inform the prospective member of the beliefs, duties, and obligations required by the vows of membership in CRPC, and to satisfy the session of CRPC that the individual understands those beliefs and obligations required for membership; These three meetings shall be conducted as follows:

1. Examine the vows required for membership, thereby covering the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.
2. Examine the vows in conjunction with the Book of Church Order of the John Knox Presbyterian Church, thereby covering the form of government in place and duties required for biblical submission to it.
3. Examine this constitution of this particular congregation and any other questions or concerns that may have arisen.

If the majority of the session is convinced that the prospective member's profession is credible according to Scriptures, and the individual agrees to take the vows of membership before the congregation as witnesses of the covenant, no one may forbid them from joining. The person will be given the vows at the next possible worship service at CRPC.

Continuation in willful sin, schismatic or divisive behavior, and/or the teaching and promotion of deviant (unorthodox) doctrine will result in discipline and finally in excommunication of the unrepentant. The Session of Covenant has power and authority to call before it any member of the congregation for the following reasons: to inquire into the knowledge and spiritual estate of said member, to admonish, and to rebuke when necessary, and exhort. The session of CRPC may not accept a transfer of membership into this body for one who is under biblical discipline in another true and Orthodox Church.

The Session has power to suspend from partaking of the Lord's Table a person not yet cast out of the church, as is agreeable to the Scriptures.

First, because the ordinance itself must not be profaned,
Second, because we are charged to withdraw from those that walk disorderly,
third, because of the great sin and danger, both to him that comes unworthily, and also to the whole church.

In the Old Testament administration, as well, the elders had power and authority to keep unclean persons from holy things. By way of analogy and for all of these reasons, the Ruling Elders of this congregation have authority to keep back such as shall be found unworthy.

Voting members shall consist of all male heads of households in good standing of at least

21 years of age.

Transfer of membership from the Covenant to another local bible-believing body may be affected by simple request from the member in question to the session of CRPC. The member seeking transfer should supply the session with a Biblical reason for leaving CRPC and must prove to the session of CRPC that the receiving church is indeed a true and Orthodox Church. Having been satisfied on these conditions, the session must issue a letter of transfer to the officers of the prospective church for all members in good standing who wish to depart lawfully, not being under discipline.

CONCERNING DISSOLUTION OR DIVISION OF ASSOCIATION

In the event that Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church seeks to dissolve its Declaration of Association and/or cease its physical existence in the State of Ohio, the residual of the Association will be conveyed to an organization, which is exempt as a not-for-profit organization, which maintains not-for-profit practices.

If the church has a division among its members, the church agrees to the following:

1. Appeal to the Presbytery on all issues, which will result in a division of the church and will abide by its determination, on the assumption that the Presbytery will use all the means at its disposal impartially to (a) resolve the situation and (b) consult all of the concerned parties.
2. Upon division of the church, the property of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church of Painesville, Ohio will be retained by those who remain with the **John Knox Presbyterian Church**.
3. The church has a responsibility to seek reconciliation. Therefore, it must seek at every opportunity to maintain the peace of the church and a Christian attitude.

Under no circumstances will individuals who are transferred, erased, or excommunicated from the membership of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, including members not in good standing, have any rights to the church and its property.

CONCERNING MEMBER OBLIGATION

All members are expected to

Uphold and support this constitution,
Endeavor to obey the teachings of the Bible to the best of their ability,
Faithfully witness to the truth of the Bible to our society in general and the lost in particular, and
Protect and support the church and its officers.

Members may hold exceptions to the constitution on matters not crucial to the essence of the Christian faith, so long as they agree to submit to the church's authority and not spread dissension or disturb the peace of the church. All members shall be required to sign a statement signifying that they have read and agree to submit to this constitution.

REVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS

Revisions and/or amendments to this constitution may be added from time to time as the session sees necessary. A two-thirds majority vote of the Session is required to make any changes to this constitution.

RATIFICATION

The undersigned, being officers and members in good standing of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church, do hereby affix their signatures, indicating their approval and acceptance of the constitutional statement above.

Applicant for membership

Applicant for membership

Witnessed by:

Teaching Elder/Pulpit Supply

Ruling Elder