

Constitution of Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship, Goodlettsville, TN

PREAMBLE

Of the Church

We believe that the Kingdom of God will expand to the ends of the earth, and the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church (Matt. 16:18). We believe in the communion of saints and in the holy catholic Church. Thus, we acknowledge that the church of God, purchased with Christ's blood, is manifested in diverse particular congregations in all the earth. We believe that it is the duty of each Christian in the holy catholic Church to be committed to and connected with a biblically ordered particular congregation located in their geographical area. Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship (PHRF) has been so constituted by Christ through His duly ordained representatives as a particular congregation of the Body of Christ. Because we believe that churches are to be connected with one another through representative presbyters (elders) for the purpose of shepherding, oversight, accountability, and discipline, our church membership resides in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC). We submit ourselves to the CREC Constitution and Bylaws, and adopt them as part of our constitution.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in PHRF as a Particular Body

Membership in our local expression of Christ's Church is constituted by a profession of faith, sealed in baptism. The profession of faith should include an affirmation of the Apostle's Creed. Baptism is the rite of initiation into the covenant of grace and the Church of Jesus Christ; the one baptized maintains good standing in the Church by walking in faith by the grace of God.

Membership at PHRF is "catholic," open to Christ's disciples of all races and ages. While baptism marks out membership in the catholic Church, professing believers, including children, ordinarily enter the membership of PHRF, as a local body, when they have approval of the session. Usually, new members will be expected to swear their membership vows in front of the session. Vows may also be taken publicly, in the context of a covenant renewal worship service, as the session deems prudent.

Those joining PHRF from outside the Church officially, as new believers or covenant children, join at their baptisms; those already baptized join PHRF when the session has approved their transfer of membership (or if they have no Church they are currently members of, they join when the session approves their profession of faith).

Parents (or sponsors/guardians) may take vows on behalf of their children, who cannot yet express their faith. Children born to at least one member parent (or belonging to a member sponsor/guardian) are regarded as heirs of the covenant even before baptism, and become full members of PHRF at their baptisms.

The elders of PHRF are responsible to examine the orthodoxy of all candidates for membership and to see that their lives do not contradict their professions. The session should make sure that all candidates coming for membership by transfer have been baptized in the Triune name. No one baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to be re-baptized. The session may delegate the task of meeting with prospective members to a commission of two elders. Interviews with prospective members should include a discussion of the candidate's Christian experience/life, the content of the membership vows, and ways in which the Church and new member can mutually serve one another.

Membership vows include:

1. Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His wrath, and without hope apart from His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of sinners, and do you trust in Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel, as prophet, priest, and king?
3. Do you now promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will strive to live a life of repentance and obedience, in a manner worthy of the followers of Christ and in accordance with the Scriptures?
4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and its work to the best of your ability?
5. Do you submit yourself to the government and discipline of the Church and promise to pursue its purity and peace?

Incoming Transfers

If those requesting membership in PHRF are presently members of another congregation, the session of PHRF will send a request of transfer to the leadership of

that congregation. If no reply is made in thirty days, the PHRF session may proceed with the membership transfer. It is the desire of PHRF to respect the governmental actions of other churches as much as possible. If the prospective member has been under discipline, a full investigation is to be made.

Records of Membership

The session of PHRF is to keep careful records of membership, including baptisms and communicant members, for the purpose of providing loving oversight of the congregation. The session should always keep the congregation informed of changes in Church membership. In special circumstances, persons who hold membership in another congregation may come under the pastoral care of PHRF without becoming full, voting members of PHRF. In these cases, the establishment of the pastoral care should be communicated to the person's home Church.

Release or Transfer of Membership

If any member requests to be released to the care of another Christian Church, he should notify the session. The session will release him with a blessing, except as noted here. If any member requests a release while under Church discipline, the session will delay acting on the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved. The matter can be resolved by acquittal, repentance, censure, or excommunication; or, if the PHRF session is reasonably confident the receiving Church will continue the disciplinary process in a biblical manner, the member may be released into the pastoral care of that Church, with a complete report of the matter passed along to the governance of that Church.

If members move from our geographical area, they are charged to find a new Church home within twelve months. This time may be reduced or extended at the session's discretion. After this time expires, they are released from membership.

Members of this Church who willfully, without plausible reason or excuse, consistently absent themselves from Lord's Day worship for more than 12 months shall be subject to formal Church discipline, as the session deems appropriate, for the purity of the Church and the Spiritual health of the absent member. If a member begins attending another Church without transferring membership over an extended period of time, longer than 12 months, he may have his name erased from the membership roll of PHRF.

Electors

Those members who vote in church elections are called electors. Electors are the heads of member households (whether men or women) and those granted voting

capacity by the session. New business brought to the attention of the elders and deacons by the electors will be appropriately considered in their respective meetings. At least two weeks prior to any church election, notice will be given. Voting will take place by electors in the a) elections of elders and deacons, b) the calling and, if warranted, dismissal of pastors, c) the amending of the Constitution and d) other times or occasions when the session may determine that a vote is necessary.

LEADERSHIP

Offices

Jesus Christ has appointed several offices for the edification and growth of His Church. The extraordinary offices of apostle and prophet have now ceased, as their foundation-laying role in redemptive history is complete (Eph. 2:20). PHRF's form of government includes and makes provision for the following ordinary and perpetual three offices: pastor, ruling elder, and deacon. Pastor is the office of Word and Sacrament. Ruling elder is an office of service and rule. Deacon is an office of service and stewardship, under the oversight of the session. Deacons are assistants to the elders, with a special calling to minister mercy, primarily among the family of God, and secondarily in the world, as well as performing other assorted tasks.

The New Testament uses the term "elder" (or "presbyter") with great breadth, to refer to both officers who minister in Word and Sacrament, as well as ruling elders, who do not ordinarily preach, teach, or administer the Sacraments. A distinction between elders who rule and elders who are also responsible for teaching and the Sacraments is made in Scripture (2 Chron. 19:8; Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:17- 4:2), with the latter linked to the Old Covenant priestly office as its new covenant counterpart (1 Cor. 9:13). Hence, we officially distinguish ruling elders and those elders who are lawfully ordained to be ministers of the Word and Sacraments as pastors. Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and ruling elders co-labor to shepherd the flock as members of the same session (1 Pt. 5:2-4), but these various types of elders differ in respect to personal calling, gifts, function, and (strictly speaking) office.

Officers in Relation to the Local Church

While it is important for the Church to always have pastoral leadership, in the providence of God, we understand that the local Church may not fill all these offices at all times.

It is lawful and proper that there be fixed congregations; that is, a certain company of Christians who meet in one assembly at a regular time and place for public worship, under the oversight of officers. When believers multiply to such a number that they

cannot conveniently meet in one place, under one session, it is practical that they divide into distinct local congregations, for the better maintenance of worship and government, and for the fulfillment of their mutual duties to one another. The ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct congregations, and most conducive to edification, is by the respective bounds of their dwellings (parishes). This is because those who dwell together, being bound to one another as neighbors, generally have a better opportunity to fulfill these obligations to one another. It is our desire to be a congregation that multiplies herself, as God prospers us.

For officers in a single congregation, there ought to be one pastor at least, both to labor in the Word and to administer the Sacraments, and to rule as a shepherd. It is also vital that there should be at least one ruling elder to join the pastor in the government of the Church. Likewise it is most helpful that there be deacons to take special care for the relief of the poor. The number of each office is to be proportioned according to the condition and needs of the congregation.

Selection and Calling of Officers

The session of elders will examine any potential candidate for office with regard to his doctrine and manner of life. If he has any disagreement or reservation about any portion of the Church's doctrinal views as expressed in the Constitution (specifically this Form of Government and the Westminster Standards), then he must inform the session of it. The session will determine if such a scruple excludes the candidate from office. All candidates must meet the general qualifications for the office set down in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pt. 5:2-4). If an officer later changes his views on some matter that would require taking an exception to the Constitution, he should notify the appropriate Church courts as soon as possible. Ministers of Word and Sacrament should notify the session and presbytery; other officers should notify the session.

In the case of a pastor, the candidate should also be examined by the presbytery as to his fitness for ministry in terms of both doctrine and life. Candidates for ministry of Word and Sacrament should have some formal theological training under the oversight of a body of elders. They should also excel in knowledge of the Scriptures, have proficiency in areas of theology and Church history, and have gifts of preaching and/or teaching. All the procedures of the CREC related to ministerial calling should be followed. The terms of a pastoral call, including compensation, vacation time, ministerial expenses, etc., shall be determined by the session when a call is issued, and then reviewed annually. Because he labors in the gospel, a Minister of Word and Sacrament shall ordinarily draw his living from the gospel, receiving support from the tithes and offerings of the congregation.

If a man is already ordained to the office for which he is a candidate at PHRF, his examination, by whatever Church court is involved, does not have to be comprehensive. His earlier ordination should be examined as to its validity, he should be interviewed with regard to his fitness for office and his calling, and he should be prepared to discuss his exceptions to the PHRF Constitution.

Nominations to any Church office may be received from any elector at any time, provided that it is delivered to the pastor or clerk of the session in writing. The session may also nominate candidates for office. Willing nominated individuals who are approved with the consent of the session will normally undergo some training, instruction, and examination, as the session desires and schedules. This will be carried out under the oversight of the pastor. The session, after the time of training, instruction, and examination is complete, may approve the nominee, or not, for election.

If a candidate is not approved for office by the session, he may request from the session a list of deficiencies or areas of concern, stated in biblical terms, and a proposed course of action for remedying these concerns.

After a candidate is approved for election, the voting ballot will provide the option of voting yes, no, or abstain. If the candidate is elected by at least a two-thirds vote, the elders will ordain him through the laying on of hands and prayer at an appropriate time, according to specifications of the PHRF Constitution.

Once in office, the officer will serve for perpetually – with an annual review to reaffirm commitment – unless he resigns or is removed or is elected for another office. Leaves of absence from service in these offices may be granted by consent of the session. The length of the leave of absence should be agreed upon by both the officer and the session. Even while on sabbatical, the officer holds his office, but he is not expected to carry the ordinary work load in the life of the Church. The status of Church officers should always be communicated to the congregation.

The first time an officer tenders his resignation, the session may refuse to accept. However, if the officer still desires to resign by the time of the next session meeting, or one month later, his resignation must be accepted and the congregation notified.

The Session and Diaconate: Organization, Procedures, and Responsibilities

Under Christ, as the Head and King of the Church, the power of Church rule has been vested in the session, composed of all elders, including pastors and governors (ruling elders) in the local Church (2 Chron. 19:8). Ordinarily, the Church should be ruled by a plurality of qualified elders.

The moderator of the session, responsible for calling and overseeing meetings, is the pastor. One member of the session shall serve as clerk and be responsible for the session's communications to and from other Churches, the presbytery, and the congregation. The clerk is elected by the session to a two year term, and may serve unlimited consecutive terms.

The session must meet at least twice a year. All meetings are open to the public, though the session may call executive meeting times when necessary. In meetings, the clerk of session will record accurate minutes of the actions taken by the session. Minutes are to be submitted back to the whole session for approval. Meeting minutes are available to any member of the congregation upon request. In all meetings of the session of presbyters, each elder has one vote.

The elders as a session are collectively responsible for ruling and shepherding (1 Pt. 5:1-2); equipping (Eph. 4:11-12); gathering the people for covenant renewal worship (Heb. 10:25); leading in times of prayer and fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3); teaching and preaching (1 Tim. 5:17); determining and overseeing admission to the Sacraments, which are baptism and the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26); administering Church discipline and restoring offenders (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5); counseling with members as needed (Prov. 11:14); and praying for the healing of the sick, including anointing with oil (Jas. 5:14-15). The session may also create (and dissolve) committees, commissions, orders, and boards, dedicated to particular areas of ministry in the life of the Church. The session may also draft and approve position papers and resolutions that speak the mind of the Church to particular issues. More specific duties of each office within the eldership are described below.

All church-related concerns and complaints should be brought to the attention of the session. A member should present concerns that are grave in nature in writing to either the pastor or clerk of the session for consideration by the session. All members of the Church are welcome and invited to call upon the session (or any individual member thereof) for special counsel, for prayer, or for confession of sin.

The session is responsible for sending the pastor and one additional delegate to all CREC presbytery and council meetings, in accord with the CREC constitution. The pastor is a permanent delegate to all higher courts. The delegate in addition to the pastor may be chosen by a vote of the session. Delegates are to vote their conscience at higher assemblies, but should also consider the desires and will of the entire PHRF session.

The diaconate is composed of the deacons. If and when the diaconate exceeds five men, they should elect an archdeacon to serve a two year term. The archdeacon is responsible for organizing the diaconate, calling and overseeing meetings, keeping

minutes from meetings, and serving as a liaison between the diaconate, the session, and the congregation. The diaconate is also responsible for electing a treasurer to a two year term to make necessary and accurate financial reports. The treasurer does not have to come from within the diaconate, provided another member of the congregation is willing and able to serve in this capacity. There is no limit to the number of consecutive terms archdeacons and treasurers may serve. The session may replace an archdeacon or treasurer at any time. The diaconate must meet at least twice a year.

Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the Church (Acts 6:2-4). Such responsibilities include preparing and administering the annual budget to be approved by the session, building maintenance, fellowship meals, administrative support, mercy ministries, and distribution of the deacons' fund to those in need. The deacons may be divided into specialized orders if expedient.

A joint officer meeting of all elders and deacons together must be held at least once a year, under the oversight of the pastor/moderator. The session should plan at least one congregational meeting a year, to update the congregation on the life of the Church and to make the budget available. The pastor shall serve as moderator of congregational meetings, though the session may choose to appoint another elder to be moderator in his place, if needed. The clerk of the session is responsible for keeping minutes in joint officer and congregational meetings. In congregational meetings, the congregation should always be given ample time to ask questions and discuss matters, especially before a vote.

Ordination

Ordination is a rite which includes the laying on of hands and prayer to set a man apart to a particular office and function within the Church. Insofar as ordination confers office in the Church, with attendant privileges and responsibilities, it is an act of God, not merely the human officiants. Ordination is effective by the grace of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, in accord with biblical teaching. The practice of ordination is important to good order within the life of the Church. With regard to ordination, we uphold these principles:

No man ought to take upon himself any ecclesiastical office without a lawful calling. A man should only be ordained if he has a call to a particular work or service in a local body or mission field. Only qualified, examined, and elected men have been duly called to office, and only such are to be ordained.

Ordination is always to be continued in the Church, but officers are only to be ordained into a particular office one time. If a man has already been ordained to office in another

local Church, he is to be installed, rather than re-ordained, in the new Church that has called him.

Ordination is the solemn consecration of a person to some public Church office. Ordination is a ritual of the Church through which the Spirit confers all the privileges and obligations of the office to which the man has been called. A man is ordained into a particular office, whether Minister of Word and Sacrament, ruling elder, or deacon. No man should be ordained to the same office more than once, but if he is called and elected to a new office, he should be ordained into the new office.

Every officer is to be ordained by the imposition of hands and prayer by a body of elders. Elders who regularly minister in Word and Sacrament participate in all ordinations. Ruling elders only participate in ordinations of other ruling elders and deacons. In other words, a man should only be ordained by the men who belong permanently to the highest court that has examined his qualifications for office. In cases of an installation, the same elders are to pray, but not lay hands on the man.

Elders from other faithful presbyteries and denominations are welcome to participate in the ordination services of PHRF since their offices are recognized and respected.

In the ordination of a man to an office of ministry in Word and Sacrament, it is most fitting to include fellow officers of Word and Sacrament who minister at other congregations in the same presbytery. In this way, the Church shows its submission to and cooperation with the whole presbytery in calling the man to be ordained.

It is agreeable to the Word of God, and very expedient, that when officers are ordained or installed, that both the man and congregation should be charged in a fitting way to fulfill their responsibilities to one another.

Ordinations and installations should take place in a public assembly of the Church, preferably a Lord's Day covenant renewal service, to signify that the right hand of fellowship has been extended to the officer.

Vows are not the essence of the ordination ritual. But vows made by both the officer (-elect) and the congregation are mutually edifying, as both parties promise to serve one another in their respective spheres, in mutual dependence upon the Lord's mercy.

Vows for a Minister of Word and Sacrament

When a pastor (or other minister of Word and Sacrament) is ordained, he and the congregation are to take the following vows. The vows and declaration are best administered by another pastor from the presbytery. The laying on of hands and prayer are to be inserted between the vows of the man and the vows of the congregation.

QUESTIONS TO THE PASTOR-ELECT

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms (apart from the exceptions noted in our constitution) as being true to the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your presbytery and session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?*
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, as stated in the constitution, as being in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of pastor in this church and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof--to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Have you been led, through prayer and earnest counsel, to seek the office of the holy ministry from love to God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?
7. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity, peace, and unity of the church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise against you on that account?
8. Do you promise to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties and obligations as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel--whether personal or relational, private or public--and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your manner of life, walking in a fashion worthy of imitation before this particular collection of God's people?
9. Are you now willing to take charge of this church, agreeable to your declaration when accepting their call? And do you, relying upon God for strength, promise to fulfill in this congregation the duties of a pastor, not in a domineering manner, but living among them as one who serves, as a representative and ambassador of Jesus Christ?

QUESTIONS TO CONGREGATION

1. Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive _____, whom you have called to be your pastor?
2. Do you promise to receive the word of truth from his mouth with meekness and love, and to submit to him as unto Christ in the due exercise of ministry and discipline?
3. Do you promise to encourage him in his work, and to assist his endeavors for your instruction and Spiritual edification, as he labors to represent Christ to you, and exercises church discipline when biblically mandated?
4. Do you promise to practice hospitality towards him, remembering his frame and the physical needs that accompany his work and his family, by providing for those needs?

Pastor: I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, ordained, and installed as Pastor of this church, agreeable to the Word of God, and that as such he is entitled to all encouragement, honor, and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

People: Amen!

When a pastor (or other minister of Word and Sacrament, already ordained) is installed, he is to take the following vows. (The congregation takes the same vows as at an ordination. The same declaration may be made as well, omitting the word "ordained.")

QUESTIONS TO THE PASTOR:

1. Are you now willing to take charge of this congregation as their pastor, agreeable to your declaration in accepting its call?
2. Do you consciously believe and declare that, in taking upon you this charge, you are driven by a sincere desire to promote the glory of God and the good of the church?
3. Do you solemnly promise that, by the assistance of the grace of God, you will endeavor faithfully to fulfill all the duties of a pastor to this congregation, and will be careful to maintain a godly manner in all respects, as becoming a minister of the Gospel of Christ, agreeable to your ordination?
4. Do you promise to uphold all the vows of your ordination, doing all your duties in such a way that your labor serves the peace, purity, and edification of the church, to the glory of God?

All vows may be modified as needed to accommodate men called to various ministries of Word and Sacrament, or the roles of assistant or associate pastor.

Vows for a Ruling Elder

When a ruling elder is ordained or installed, he and the congregation are to take the following vows. The laying on of hands and prayer (at an ordination service) are to be inserted between the vows of the man and the vows of the congregation.

QUESTIONS FOR RULING ELDER (-ELECT)

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt in good faith the Westminster Confession and Catechisms (apart from the exceptions noted at the end of this document), as being true to the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, as in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of elder in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the church?

QUESTION FOR THE CONGREGATION

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as elder, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord to which this office, according to the Word of God and the constitution of this church, entitles him?

Pastor: I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, ordained, and installed as an elder in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, and

that as such he is entitled to all encouragement, honor, and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

People: Amen!

If the ruling elder is being installed rather than ordained, the same vows are to be used, though the word "ordained" may be omitted from the declaration.

Vows for a Deacon

When a deacon is ordained or installed, he and the congregation are to take the following vows. The laying on of hands and prayer (at an ordination service) are to be inserted between the vows of the man and the vows of the congregation.

QUESTIONS FOR THE DEACON (-ELECT)

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt in good faith the Confession and the Catechisms of this Church, as being true to the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, as in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of deacon in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the church?

QUESTION FOR THE CONGREGATION

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as deacon, and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which this office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this church, entitles him?

Pastor: I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, and ordained, and installed a deacon in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, and that as such he is entitled to all encouragement, honor and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!

People: Amen!

If the deacon is being installed rather than ordained, the same vows are to be used, though the word “ordained” may be omitted from the declaration.

Duties and Privileges of Officers

New Covenant Officers and Orders in General

As suggested above, the Church of Jesus Christ inherited a form of government from old covenant Israel. While this pattern has been transformed and adapted to the new covenant situation, the precedents and principles of the old covenant system are still relevant and instructive as a model for Church polity. The Church, as the New Israel, is to fulfill Israel’s calling in history, through Christ. Analogies between old covenant and new covenant positions align roughly as follows:

- Old covenant prophets and priests = New covenant Ministers of Word and Sacrament
- Elders of the people/gate, judges, kings/shepherds = Ruling elders
- Levites, assistants/apprentices = Deacons

The ministry of the priests, as well as apostles and prophets, is carried on in the work of the Ministers of Word and Sacrament. However, these ministers do not claim prophetic or apostolic inspiration; instead, they build upon the foundation that has already been laid once and for all in the apostolic era (Eph. 2:20).

Ministers of Word and Sacrament fulfill the priestly role (as the primary liturgical and sacramental officers of the Church) and the prophetic role (as they declare and apply God’s Word to the congregation and the world). They also lead the people in intercessory prayer before the throne of grace. In their governing role, they work with the other elders.

Elders of the people, or ruling elders, are not the primary liturgical or teaching officers. They can, however, assist the pastor in the liturgy and teaching, in line with their giftings. They primarily focus on overseeing the people the other six days, outside of Lord’s Day worship gatherings. Their work is to build up and strengthen the community, providing wise oversight and direction. As “chief laymen,” they are responsible for

maintaining good order and justice in the community, acting as judges, peacekeepers, and counselors. Along with the Ministers of Word and Sacrament, they oversee the formal Church discipline process.

Deacons have the most flexible job description, as the elders determine what they are to do in a given situation. They are to Ministers of Word and Sacrament what Levites were to the priests; or what Joshua was to Moses; or what Elisha was to Elijah. They are assistants to elders and may be apprentices-in-training, but the diaconal office is not one of authority or governance in the Church. Deacons may be permanent, or may transition into a form of eldership at an appropriate time. In general, they do those things that allow the elders to focus more directly on the ministries given to them as members of the Church session; thus, we find in the biblical record, new covenant deacons are especially called upon to care for those in need (Acts 6:1-6). This mercy ministry function is the central assigned task of the diaconate at PHRF, though the session may direct the diaconate or individual deacons to engage in other works as well, in accord with the nature of the office as described below.

We now turn to the specifics of each called ministry in the Church.

The Office of Pastor (or Minister)

The pastor is an ordinary and perpetual officer in the Church (Eph. 4: 11; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5- 9). The pastorate is especially the new covenant counterpart to the old covenant priesthood, even as each local congregation is a miniature fulfillment of the typology of the old covenant temple. The pastor is the primary servant-priest among and towards the royal priesthood of the whole congregation, with the goal of presenting the people in Christ as an acceptable offering to the Father, sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:16). It especially belongs to the pastoral office, to pray for and with his flock, as the mouth of the people unto God; to pray publicly for the people, especially in gathered worship; to pray privately for and with the people, especially for the sick; and to pray for the lost;

To oversee the planning and leading of the Lord's Day liturgy, as the priests of the Old Covenant led the people in worship at the tabernacle and temple;

To read, preach, and teach the Scriptures publicly, as the mouth of God to people, even as the priests in the Jewish Church were trusted with the public reading and exposition of the Word;

To study the Scriptures diligently, in order to feed the flock divine truth, as he preaches, teaches, convinces, reproves, exhorts, and comforts from the Word;

To train the people to live as a royal priesthood, offering Spiritual sacrifices in all of life, and especially in gathered worship;

To administer the Sacraments publicly and privately in emergency situations, as the priests under the Law administered the sacrifices;

To declare absolution to the Lord's repentant people, both publicly in gathered worship, and privately, after they have confessed their sins;

To bless the people from God, declaring a benediction, as the priests did under the Old Covenant;

To encourage husbands and fathers to be faithful in loving their wives as Christ loves the Church and in raising their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord; to encourage wives and mothers to be diligent and faithful by caring for their families with joy and contentment; to encourage singles to pursue purity and service in accord with their vocations; and to encourage children to grow towards maturity in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ;

To take care of the poor, in conjunction with the other officers;

To represent the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, in lovingly caring for and disciplining the flock in conjunction with the other elders;

To lead the session as moderator and overseer;

To represent the local congregation as a permanent delegate to all higher assemblies of the Church.

Should the Church ever be without a pastor, it should strive to secure one without delay (Mt. 9:36). The elders should seek out suitable nominees as necessary. The elders will examine a nominee with regard to his doctrine, manner of life, and confessional adherence. In addition to the qualifications for elders, pastoral candidates must meet the biblical criteria for shepherds (2 Samuel 12:1ff, Ps. 23, John 10:11-16, etc.). Following this process, the elders may approve the nominee as a candidate to be placed on a ballot.

The electors will be asked whether or not a call to the pastorate should be extended to him; the ballot will include an option to abstain. If the candidate is approved by two-thirds vote in an election, the elders will extend a provisional call to him to be pastor. His call to be pastor is finalized only after the CREC's presbytery duly approves him. Following CREC approval, he may be ordained (if necessary) and installed as

pastor. (It is also lawful for the candidate to be examined by the presbytery before a vote of the congregation. In such cases, the congregation's call is not provisional.)

While PHRF encourages her pastor(s) toward a long-term view of the ministry, in the providence of God, changes in a pastor's call to a particular Church arise for both righteous and sinful reasons. In cases involving moral failures requiring disciplinary proceedings, the disciplinary process for the removal of a pastor is the same as for other officers, as described below. For cases that do not involve moral failures or disciplinary proceedings (e.g., Acts 15:33-41, Rom. 15:22-33, 1 Cor. 16:5-12), the procedure for terminating the call of a pastor, thereby dismissing him from service at PHRF, is as follows: The pastor may submit his resignation in writing and in person to the session. If the session accepts his resignation, he is relieved of his pastoral call to PHRF. If the session does not accept his resignation, he may tender it again at the next session meeting, or after at least one month has passed, in which case it must be accepted.

As need and resources dictate, PHRF may call a man to serve as a pastoral assistant or associate pastor. The assistant is to be called by the session and after examination by the session and presbytery, ordained and/or installed according to the principles of the Constitution. An assistant does not have a vote on the session, and may not serve as a delegate to a higher court, but he does have full power to minister in Word and the Sacraments. An associate is called in the same manner, except his call also requires the election of the congregation by a two-thirds vote. He becomes a member of the session and may be a delegate to a higher court. Job responsibilities for assistants and associates are to be determined by the session.

Other Church-Governors (or Ruling Elders or Lay Elders)

As there were in Old Covenant Israel elders of the people joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the Jewish Church, so Christ has instituted governors in the New Covenant Church, commonly called ruling elders (2 Chron. 19:8; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28). These men are "elders of the gate," called upon to oversee the social life of the community as "chief laymen." They are to be wise and God fearing men, fit for leadership. Ruling elders are especially gifted in governing, though they may have other gifts as well. Governing the Church as a ruling elder is a matter of serving and caring for the people, setting before them a godly example in vocational and familial life, counseling and encouraging them, and engaging in discipline as needed. It is imperative that ruling elders know the people of the congregation well and command their trust and respect.

Ruling elders differ from other elders (the Ministers of Word and Sacrament) in that they are not subject to examinations from presbytery with regard to their call to office; they

typically have daily vocations outside the Church; and they usually do not receive remuneration from the Church for their services. However, on the session, they rule jointly with the other elders and have the same formal authority. They may serve as representatives of the Church in presbytery and council meetings. It especially belongs to the office of ruling elder,

To serve on the session, and thus rule the people;

To advise Ministers of Word and Sacraments in their special work and represent the congregation on the session;

To oversee the doctrine and practice of the flock;

To set an example of godliness in all things;

To act as peacekeepers and judges in cases of dispute;

To pray with and for the people, especially in time of illness; and to anoint the sick with oil when requested, along with the Ministers of Word and Sacrament;

To counsel and nurture the members of the congregation towards godliness, encouraging and correcting them as needed;

To assist the pastor in leading the liturgy when needed or appropriate;

To assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper and the collection of tithes and offerings;

To execute Church discipline when and as situations require it;

To join with the deacons in caring for the poor and needy.

Ruling elders labor beside Ministers of the Word and Sacraments (ie pastors) in lovingly shepherding and discipling the people.

The Office of Deacon

The Scripture holds out deacons as distinct officers in the Church. Deacons are called to be assistants to the Ministers of Word and Sacrament (Acts 6:1-6) just as the Levites were assistants to the priests; and also to act as assistants to the ruling elders, operating under their oversight and authority. Deacons can be gifted and used in a wide variety of ways in the life of the Church. Deacons serve in ways authorized by the elders, freeing the elders to focus on their more specialized tasks. Primarily, it belongs to the office of deacon,

To take special care in mercy ministries and in meeting the needs of the poor, the immigrant, the prisoner, the fatherless, and the widow, first within the household of God, and second, in the world;

To befriend the friendless, and care for those in distress, in times of illness, bereavement, or other adversity, after the example of the Lord Jesus Christ;

To disburse funds from the Church treasury on behalf of the session;

To encourage the rest of the Church's membership to excel in hospitality and benevolence, ministering to one another and to those outside the Church in deed as well as word;

To assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper and the collection of tithes and offerings;

To assist in the Church's liturgical feasts and fellowship meals;

To make recommendations to the session about budget and property, as stewards of the Church's resources and assistants to the elders;

To care for and maintain the property of the Church.

To assist in leading the liturgical services of the Church as needed, able, and directed by the session;

To assist the music ministry of the Church as needed, able, and directed by the session;

To teach the flock and evangelize the lost, as needed, able, and directed by the session;

While the office of deacon is not ordinarily one of administering Word and Sacrament, in times of necessity or in the absence of an officer ordained to administer the Sacraments, the pastor or presbytery or presiding minister of presbytery may appoint a deacon to administer.

Men who are training for an elder ministry may serve as deacons as part of their preparation, to test their gifts, gain experience, and prove their faithfulness.

Resignation or Removal from Church Office

While Church offices are ordinarily perpetual, sometimes officers have their call terminated for providential or moral reasons. If an officer desires to resign or take a leave of absence, he will present a letter to the session. The length of a sabbatical should be agreed upon by the officer and the session. If the session approves, it will

notify the Church. If the session does not accept the resignation, the officer may offer it again at the next session meeting, or in a month, at which time it must be accepted.

If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal irregularity, then the resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate Biblical discipline.

Members are urged to be extremely reluctant to bring charges against any officer, covering over offenses and overlooking shortcomings in a spirit of brotherly love, and remembering what the Bible says about those who bear false testimony and judge others (especially rulers) harshly. If two or three witnesses believe an elder or deacon to be morally or doctrinally unfit for office, then they may present charges to the session in writing and in person (1 Tim. 5:19). If the session (excluding the accused from voting, in such a case) decides that the question is worthy of an investigation and/or hearing, at their discretion they may inform the congregation of the charges, announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or hearing, and encourage members (especially heads of households) to attend. If the charges are sustained by the other elders after trial, then the accused officer, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction, may be rebuked by the session (1 Tim. 5:20), or may be removed from office (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), or both. If the charges prove to be slanderous, those who brought them may be subject to censure by the session. If the offense was criminal, the members of the session should notify the civil authorities as well.

In case an officer under discipline has charges against him sustained, his call to office may be involuntarily terminated by a vote of the session (excluding said officer, if he is an elder). In such a case of removal from office, the officer may have recourse to the electors by calling for a vote to either sustain his call as officer or not (with an option to abstain). If the electors 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 courts for binding arbitration.

An officer may also be relieved of his office at any time if three-fourths of the electors petition the session to that effect. The elder may appeal the action of the congregation to the higher courts of the CREC, according to any provisions of the CREC Constitution, if he believes the congregation has acted without sufficient warrant.

An officer (elder or deacon) may also be removed from office if all the elders (other than an elder whose call to office is being challenged) agree to remove him from office. Again, he may appeal as described above.

The session should always notify the congregation of changes in the status of an officer, as soon as reasonably possible.

LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS

The Covenantal Form of Worship

The Lord's Day (Sunday) worship service at PHRF follows the Bible's covenant renewal pattern of Calling, Confession/Cleansing, Consecration, Communion, and Commissioning. Every worship service should include a call to worship; singing to God; confession of sin and declaration of forgiveness; calling upon God's name in prayer; reading and exposition of the Word; the collection of tithes and offerings; confession of our common faith; celebration of the Eucharistic feast with bread and wine; and a benediction.

The session may also schedule other times of worship (including the Eucharist), especially in accord with the historic Christian calendar. While only Lord's Day services are considered essential, members are strongly encouraged to participate in these other worship events, unless providentially hindered. Members are also encouraged to participate in other educational programs and social events in the life of the Church.

The Nature of Baptism

Baptism is a blessed sacrament of the New Covenant instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of salvation and initiation into his new humanity. The sacramental washing with water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, officially admits a person into the covenant family of God. By the promise of the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit, baptism becomes an effectual means of grace to believers. As a means of grace, baptism testifies of their identification with the Triune God of Scripture, union with Christ, regeneration, forgiveness of sin, consecration to walk in newness of life, and fellowship in the Body of Christ (Mt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:11-12; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-5; Tit. 3:5; Mark 1:4). The one baptism of the New Covenant is the fulfillment of the many baptismal events and rituals of the Old Covenant, as well as circumcision, and anointing into office; hence, baptism is not to be repeated.

Baptism, as a public instrument of union with Christ and His people, is ordinarily to be performed in the context of a Lord's Day covenant renewal service, at the beginning of the liturgy. However, baptism's validity is in no way tied to its enactment at a certain time or in a certain place or by a certain person. Especially in cases of extremity or emergency, baptism may be performed outside of a regular worship service. In cases of emergency baptisms, the session and congregation should be notified of the action as soon as possible.

While symbolic actions surrounding the rite of baptism and drawing attention to its meaning are entirely proper, the baptismal liturgy should be kept relatively simple.

Recipients of Baptism

Baptism, as has been nearly universally held in the Church, is appropriately administered to the children of Christians in infancy, since to them, no less than to adults are the promises of the kingdom. Every covenantal administration in Scripture makes provision for the next generation; the ritual washings and baptismal types of the Old Covenant included children; Jesus declared that even the infants of His people participate in his covenant and kingdom and are believers; and the Apostles continued the practice of including children by baptizing households and regarding the children of Christians to be “in the Lord.” Thus, Christ and His redemptive benefits belong to disciples of all ages (Acts 2:39; Mt. 18:15-17; Eph. 6:4). That which is signified and conferred in baptism is applicable to infants promised to be in covenant, as well as to adults who profess faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Baptismal candidates, whether children or adults, must ordinarily be approved by the session. Adults should confess their allegiance to Christ prior to baptism. Minor children in the households of Christians should be baptized on the basis of one or more parent’s (or guardian’s) covenantal membership (Acts 16:31-34) and promise to nurture and train the child in the faith in the home (Gen. 18:19). However, for those who desire to delay the baptism of their children, the session shall defer to the head of each household.

When a child is baptized, parents are encouraged, though not required, to make public vows. The congregation makes a vow in response to the baptism, receiving the child into the membership and nurture of the Church in the name of Christ. The parental vows are edifying, as a way of professing the parents’ faith in the covenantal promises, declaring what they hope and expect God to accomplish in the administration of the Sacrament, and demonstrating publicly why their child has a right to baptism. In the vows, the parents also profess faith on behalf of their child. The vows are a public way of indicating why the child has a right to baptism.

To the parents:

1. Do you bring this child for baptism in faith, trusting in God's covenant promises to be your child's God (Gen. 17:7) and Savior from sin (Acts 16:31; 1 Pt. 3:21), persuaded that God desires to receive your child into his family and flock (Mt. 18:1-14), and speaking on his behalf as his representative and sponsor (Mt. 15:22)?

2. Do you bring this child for baptism in faith, trusting God to unite him to Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-14); to clothe him with Christ (Gal. 3:27); to make him a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 19:14); to give him the Holy Spirit (Isa. 59:21; Acts 2:38-39); to bestow righteousness upon him

(Ps. 103:17); to make him holy (1 Cor. 7:14); to forgive his sins (Acts 22:16); and to make this baptism his entrance into the covenant community (Tit. 3:5)?

3. Do you promise in faith and in reliance upon the grace of God to disciple this child by teaching him all of Christ's commandments (Mt. 28:18-20); directing him to fear and obey God (Gen. 18:19; Ecc. 12:13) and to love the Lord his God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength (Dt. 6:1-25); and to bring him up in the training and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), that he might walk worthy of the calling he has received in the gospel all throughout his life (Eph. 4:1)?

4. In the name of your child, and on his behalf: Do you renounce the devil and all his works; the vain pomp and false glory of the world, with all its covetous desires; and the sinful inclinations of the flesh, so that you will not follow, nor be led by them?

5. In the name of your child, and on his behalf: Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth; in the Lord Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and was crucified for us; who then rose again from the dead on the third day and now reigns at the right hand of his Father; and who will return in glory to judge the living and the dead; and do you believe in the Holy Spirit; the one holy catholic and apostolic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and life everlasting?

To the congregation:

Do you, the congregation of Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship, promise to undertake the responsibility of assisting these parents as they nurture this child in Christian faith and practice to the glory of God?

The Eucharist (or Lord's Supper, or Communion)

The Eucharist is a blessed Sacrament of the New Covenant instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of His redemptive work, and as a means of offering and giving Himself and His benefits to His people through the elements of bread and wine. By eating the bread and drinking the cup in a worthy manner, as one family, believers Spiritually feed upon Christ, renew their union and communion with Him, memorialize His death before the Father, and Spiritually commune with other covenant members (Luke 22:20; Mat. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Cor. 10:14-21). The Eucharistic feast is the supreme climax of covenant renewal worship, as we celebrate peace with God and one another. The Lord's Supper fulfills all the sacramental meals of the Old Covenant.

Recipients of the Eucharist

PHRF practices “covenant communion.” That is, we encourage all baptized Christians (in good standing, not excommunicated), to celebrate the feast of the Eucharist and so commune with Christ in His body. Visiting Christians should abide by the policies of their home Church with regard to participation. In principle, we confess that the Eucharistic table belongs to all of God’s people, and invite all other Christians to join with us in feasting and celebrating the Lord’s presence and gifts in and through bread and wine.

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the Sacraments remains with the session. Baptized children are welcome to partake as soon as they are able to express an awareness of and a desire for the elements.

While the Lord’s Supper is ordinarily to be administered in the context of the whole local body on the Lord’s Day, the pastor and/or session may designate other times of celebration as well. The Eucharist may be included in special services, especially those coordinated with this historic Church calendar (e.g., Maundy Thursday). The Eucharist may also be administered by the pastor to the sick and to invalids, who are unable to attend the congregation’s regular assemblies, even if only two or three are present.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Informal and Formal Discipline

One of the marks of a true Church of Jesus Christ is that it maintains discipline. Indeed, a biblical application of discipline is necessary to maintain the boundary between the Church and the world. The purpose of Church discipline is to prevent, restrain, or even to remove any evil that may threaten the Church; and to promote and encourage that which is good and glorifying to God. Church discipline, in all its forms -- preventative, formative, corrective, and final -- is essential to the ministry and mission of the Church, for without it the saints are not properly edified and protected, and those outside the Church are led to mock the gospel and the hypocrisy of God’s people.

All PHRF members are encouraged to love one another as they love themselves. By God’s grace, disciplinary procedures will rarely be necessary, as we seek to live together in a community of rich, deep fellowship and friendship, continually encouraging one another in faithfulness and holiness. We must also remember that our Savior warned against the dangers of judging one another without mercy and called upon us to forgive as we desire to be forgiven.

We must let love cover a multitude of sins. However, love also requires confronting sin at times, and when those occasions arise, it is critical that matters be handled in a peaceful, wise, humble, and gracious manner. Only he who is Spiritual should seek to correct a brother in sin. He should do so in gentleness, knowing that he is capable of

falling himself. We must first remove the beams from our own eyes. While this Constitution seeks to provide a set of procedures and guidelines for dealing with disciplinary situations, the chief concern of all involved should never simply be doing things according to the proper form, but acting towards one another in love, in a manner most likely to turn the straying one back to the right path. God delights more in love among the brethren and the exercise of mercy than technically correct procedures carried out in a cold hearted fashion. We desire to be fully biblical in both our procedures and relationships, of course.

The ordinary course of discipline is informal. Members are encouraged to practice self-discipline and self-control, as fruit of the Spirit. Members are urged to overlook the failings of others in love (1 Pt. 4:8), and to stir up other members of the body to charity and good works (Heb. 10:19- 25). Most Church discipline should be members lovingly and winsomely holding one another accountable to live according to the rule of Christ.

Formal Church discipline is applied through the official action and judgment of the session. All members should be aware that membership in PHRF makes one a proper object of Church discipline as the Scriptures and membership vows require. Church members are children of the heavenly Father, and sometimes His chastening comes through the instrumentality of the Church (Heb. 12:3-11). Except in cases of criminal action, the pattern of Church discipline will generally include private informal confrontation, private formal admonishment by two or three witnesses (Mt. 18:16), formal public admonishment (Mt. 18:17), and a formal hearing which may result in excommunication (Mt. 18:17). Excommunication should ordinarily be a public act of the Church. Repentance always terminates the Church discipline process and restores the offender. Public sins may still call for public censure and/or public confession, as the session sees fit, even if the offender is repentant. The session should always prayerfully consider the various ramifications of such censure or confession, aiming at the glory of God and the good of the body as a whole.

While following these general biblical principles, the session shall establish the specific procedures for all formal discipline on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include a clear and timely warning to the individual that he is in the process of formal discipline, two or three visits or communications involving two or three witnesses, and clear records and/or minutes of the entire proceedings kept by the elders. The session should only move to the next step in the disciplinary process with great care and after much prayer.

When the elders determine that a hearing is necessary, they will establish the specific procedures for each trial on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances

and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include informing the accused in writing of the specific charges, the time, place, and date of the trial, and ample time for the accused to prepare a defense. At the hearing, one of the elders will give 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 (as the session deems fit).

At a separate, subsequent meeting of the elders, after prayerful consideration, a vote will be taken on each of the charges presented. The elders will declare their verdict to the congregation on an appointed Lord's Day, following an appropriate exhortation. The elders will remind the congregation to refrain from self-righteous judgments, unloving gossip, and other forms of hurtful speech about the accused. The elders will also instruct the congregation how to best express love to the one who has stood trial. The elders will provide the accused with a written copy of the verdict.

The elders will establish an official file containing all the records pertaining to the hearing, including all pertinent correspondence, transcripts, and minutes. If he requests it, the accused will be given one copy of this file at the expense of the Church.

Excommunication will end when in the evaluation of the elders the one under discipline has repented. A confession of this repentance will be read to the congregation on the Lord's Day, and the elders shall formally announce the end of the discipline and restoration of fellowship.

In all matters of discipline, members of PHRF are urged to remember the purposes of such discipline: the glory of God, whose honor is tarnished when the people who bear His name live scandalously; the restoration of the offender; and the prevention of similar falls on the part of other Christians.

Subjects of Discipline

Any communicant member may be disciplined by the Church. Non-communicant members of member households are subject to pastoral admonishment from the Church. Non-member communicant Christians who attend Church regularly are subject to pastoral admonition, but not to formal excommunication. Nevertheless, an attending non-member who is divisive, heretical, scandalous, or factious may be barred from the Eucharist and rejected after proper admonition. If another Church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to PHRF desiring to join, then the session will honor the discipline of the other Church, unless after due consultation with the person concerned and after all appropriate information is considered, the session

rejects or reverses such disciplinary action as out of accord with the government of Christ and the teaching of the Scriptures.

Appeals

Members of PHRF may appeal the actions of the session to the presbytery and/or council of the CREC, in accord with any provisions of the CREC Constitution. Or appeals may be brought before an ad hoc court for binding arbitration. The composition of such ad hoc courts should be mature Christian men, agreed upon by both the accused and the accusers, and the specific procedures of arbitration may be established on a case-by-case basis, in accord with the principles of this Constitution and the Scriptures.

DISSOLUTION

PHRF may be dissolved by the unanimous vote of the session and two-thirds of the electors. In the event of dissolution, all of the Church's debts shall be fully paid and any remaining assets and holdings designated by the session to other such churches as are in general agreement with PHRF's doctrinal outlook.

REVISING AND AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

We recognize that while God has given to His Church through His Word a plan of government, that form does not cover all necessary details. Thus, many aspects of this Constitution do not presume to be biblically mandated, but only consistent with biblical principles, guided by sanctified common sense and a desire to do all things prudently, decently, and in order. Thus, we recognize the limitations of this Constitution and its subordination to the higher standard of Scripture. We also recognize that the practice of Christian faithfulness and charity is the best way to compensate for constitutional and procedural deficiencies. The character of office-holders is vastly more important to the health of the Church than the details of the form of government.

The Constitution of PHRF may be revised or amended at any time with the consent of a majority of the session and the approval of two-thirds of the electors. Such votes require two weeks notice. The reasons for the proposed changes should be clearly explained to the congregation. The congregation should be given ample time to discuss the issue publicly in a congregational meeting.

As we confess that this Constitution is a fallible work of fallible men, it may be set aside without the process of amendment by the judgment of the session, if obedience to Scripture is found to require it. Under such circumstances, the congregation will be informed, and the Constitution amended at the first opportunity.

CONFESSIONS, CREEDS AND NOTATIONS OF EXCEPTIONS

Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship adopts the *the Apostle's Creed*, *the Nicene Creed*, *the Definition of Chalcedon*, and *the Westminster Confession of Faith of 1646 (WCF)* as its standard confessional document with the following exceptions:

- 1) We allow for paedocommunion which the *WCF* does not condone. At Pilgrim Hill Reformed Fellowship we will not promote inserting the elements into the mouths of infants who cannot consume solid food yet, but will give to a baptized child when they are able to express even a rudimentary desire for them.
- 2) We are hesitant about the language in *WCF* 7.2 that the "first covenant made with man was a covenant of works" if by 'works' it is meant that Adam was able to achieve 'life' apart from grace. We prefer the "covenant of life."
- 3) We believe that recreation can be engaged upon the Lord's Day, as part of the celebration of the day.
- 4) We believe that the last sentence of 24.4, "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" should be stricken.
- 5) 25.6: Though we believe the office of the Pope of Rome, as defined by the Roman Catholic Church, to be unbiblical, we do not believe him necessarily to be the Anti-Christ, Man of Lawlessness, or Beast of Revelation, etc.

PHRF also adopts the *Confessional Statement on Sex, Gender and Marriage* as stated in the CREC Governing Documents, also appreciates the instruction and edification resulting from other Reformed confessional documents and catechisms, such as the *Belgic Confession*, *Scots Confession*, *Heidelberg Catechism*, *Canons of Dort*, and *Second Helvetic Confession*.