

CHRIST CHURCH TRI-CITIES

Established 2023

A member of the Communion of Reformed and Evangelical Churches

I. Preamble

In submission to Scripture, we confess the purpose of our church is to glorify God through reverent worship, proclaiming Christ to sinners, and building up our members through preaching the whole counsel of God and observing Christ's sacraments. To these ends, we establish the following constitution, Christ Church Tri-Cities.

II. Affiliation

Christ Church Tri-Cities is a member congregation in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC).

As a member congregation within the CREC, we hereby adopt, by reference as part of this constitution, the Constitution of the CREC, as it may be amended from time to time.

III. Statement of Faith

Our various creeds and confessions express an important part of who we are as a church. We confess and believe them together with our fathers in the faith and our brothers throughout the world. We are baptized into the church's company as members of the same body, the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with them we eat of a common loaf and drink from a common cup. Their creed is our creed, even as their life is our life—one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

The elders of Christ Church Tri-Cities therefore subscribe to the following creeds and confessions, holding them to be a faithful witness to what the Scriptures teach, and as a means of identifying with the broader Church:

The Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed, Athanasian Creed, Definition of Chalcedon, Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dordt, London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, Westminster Confession of Faith, Westminster Larger Catechism, and Westminster Shorter Catechism.

IV. Membership

A. Eligibility

Membership in Christ Church Tri-Cities is designated by households and is a mutually binding covenant between the church and its members.

A household may be accepted into membership after the representative head of household affirms by vow that:

- (1) The household subscribes to creeds and confessions of the Christian faith described in Article III.
- (2) The household has been baptized (or in the case of a household holding to believers' baptism, the adults and those children who have professed faith have been baptized).
- (3) The household is committed to the maintenance of a holy fellowship and participation in the worship of God as set forth in our constitution.
- (4) The household is not presently walking in unrepentant sin or heresy.
- (5) The household is willing to submit to the rule of Christ in all things. This willingness includes subjection to the moral law of God in all of life, submission to one another in the bonds of Christ's church, and submission to the church leadership.
- (6) The household wishes to be formally recognized as members of Christ Church Tri-Cities and united to the congregation by their public vows expressed at a regular worship service of the church.

Membership begins when the covenant membership vows have been taken (Philemon 2; Heb. 13:7,17).

The elders oversee a membership list, which must include names, baptisms, and communicant status.

Non-members who attend Christ Church Tri-Cities regularly for six months will be regarded as informal members of the church, at the discretion of the elders, and will be placed under the elders' authority and pastoral care.

B. Release or Transfer of Membership

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

When the circumstances surrounding the member's failure to join a faithful Christian church are problematic, the elders have the option of applying erasure with censure. If the circumstances do not rise to the level of suspension or excommunication, or if they do not permit it, the elders have the option, at their discretion, of dismissing the person with a letter of admonition or rebuke, according to circumstance. An erasure with censure requires a unanimous vote of the elders. If this threshold is not reached, then the dismissal will be a simple erasure.

C. Communicant Members

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the sacraments remains with the elders, who nevertheless respect the pastoral responsibilities of parents. Children in households who have not been baptized are recognized by the elders to be non-communicant members of member households.

Children in households who have been baptized and have come to the Lord's Table are communicant members of the church.

D. Congregational Meetings

The elders shall periodically call congregational meetings for the purpose of directing the affairs of the church and as a formal channel through which the elders and deacons may instruct the flock and receive input and advice from the member households.

E. Establishment of New Households

Although new households are normally established when two individuals come together in marriage, unmarried adults in the church 20 years and older are considered households in the church after conforming with Article IV.A.

V. Elections

A. Electors

In church elections, voting is done by household. Those households eligible to vote will be called elector households. For voting purposes, an elector household is defined as a household where the head of that household is a member in good standing. Elector households may vote in the elections of elders and deacons. The elders will qualify elector households. Two weeks prior to any church election, a ballot will be provided. Elections will be conducted at appropriate times set by the elders.

B. Election of Elders

A prospect for elder may be identified by the elders, by the members of the congregation, or may volunteer himself. Once a man is presented for consideration, the elders will examine him for the office of elder regarding his giftedness for teaching, his doctrine, his shepherding abilities, and his manner of life. If the nominee has any disagreement or mental reservation about the statement of faith found in Article III or this constitution, he must inform the elders of it. All prospects for elder must meet the qualifications for the office set down in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9; 1 Pet. 5:2–4; 1 Tim. 3:8–13).

Once approved, the nominee may work through a short course of training on eldership under the oversight of the current session. His name will then be placed on a ballot for the electors.

The nominee must be confirmed as an elder by a unanimous vote of the elders.

Once ordained, the elder will serve for life.

C. Election of Deacons

Once nominated, a candidate for deacon will be included by the deacons in their work to prove his fitness for office (1 Tim. 3:10).

When in their judgment, the candidate has demonstrated this, the deacons will make a recommendation to the elders to place his name on the ballot for the electors.

If, in the judgment of the elders, the candidate receives the clear and obvious support of the church as represented, the candidate must be confirmed as a deacon by a unanimous vote of the elders.

The elders will then ordain him through laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 6:6).

Once ordained, the deacon will serve for life.

VI. Government

In accordance with the teaching of the New Testament, there are two offices in the church, elder and deacon.

Those who serve in either capacity must be and continue in agreement with the statement of faith found in Article III.

A. Duties of Elders

Under Christ, the authority of the local church is the board of elders or presbyters in session. The elders are collectively responsible for ruling/shepherding (1 Pet. 5:1–2); equipping (Eph. 4:11–12); prayer/fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1–3); teaching/preaching (1 Tim. 5:17); administering baptism and the Lord’s Table (Matt. 28:19–20; 1 Cor. 11:23–26); administering church discipline and restoration (1 Cor. 5:1–5), and visiting the sick (Jas. 5:14–15).

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

Elder business will be conducted at regular meetings called for the purpose. The elders will establish an agenda for the meetings and record minutes. Individual elders are responsible for those duties delegated to them by the elders in session, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts, abilities, and desires.

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

B. Duties of Deacons

Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church (Acts 6:2–4). Such

responsibilities include preparing and administering the annual budget, building maintenance, deacon's fund, fellowship meals, administrative review of subordinate ministries, preparation of communion elements, and office support.

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

Individual deacons are responsible for those duties assigned to them by the deacons, as recorded in the minutes, with due regard to their gifts and desires.

C. Resignation of Elders or Deacons

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

D. Removal of Elders, Deacons, and Ministers

If a church officer believes himself to be qualified to continue in office, but two or three believers hold that he is disqualified, these two or three witnesses should request a special session of the elder board where they would be allowed to present their case (1 Tim. 5:19). If the elders decide that the case has merit, with a unanimous vote, that church officer, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to the correction, will be rebuked in the presence of the heads of households (1 Tim. 5:20), or will be removed from the office of elder or deacon (as the case may be) (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), or both.

VII. Church Discipline

The ordinary course of discipline is informal. Members are encouraged to self-discipline, overlooking the failings of others in love (1 Pet. 4:8), and encouraging other members to covenant faithfulness (Matt. 18:15).

Formal church discipline is applied through the formal action and unanimity of the elders. Except in cases of scandal requiring immediate action, the pattern of church discipline will generally include formal private admonishment by two or three (Matt. 18:16), formal public admonishment and suspension from the Supper (2 Thess. 3:14- 15), and a formal hearing which may result in excommunication (Matt. 18:17).

Any communicant member may be disciplined by the church. Un-baptized members of member households are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church, but not excommunication. Christians who attend church regularly, but are non-members, are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church, but not excommunication. If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to our church, the elders will decide whether to honor the discipline of the other church after due consultation with the person concerned and after all appropriate information is sought from the disciplining church.

The elders shall establish the specific procedures for all formal discipline on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include a clear and timely warning of the individual that he is in the process of formal discipline, two or three visits or communications involving two or three witnesses, and clear records and/or minutes of the entire proceedings kept by the elders.

When the elders determine that a hearing is necessary, they will establish the specific procedures for each trial on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include informing the accused in writing of the specific charges, the time, place, and date of the trial, and ample time for the accused to prepare a defense.

A congregational meeting will be formed for the hearing at the first opportunity. At the hearing, one of the elders will present a solemn charge from the Scriptures on the responsibilities of those present, the evidence against the accused will be presented, and the accused will have time to make a reasonable defense, including the right to question any witnesses.

At a separate meeting of the elders, a vote will be taken on each of the charges. A unanimous decision is required for a guilty verdict. A final vote of excommunication should be taken. A unanimous decision is required for excommunication. If the vote fails to get a unanimous decision, the party should be returned to full fellowship.

The elders will declare their verdict to the congregation on an appointed Lord's Day, following an appropriate exhortation. The accused will be given a written copy of the verdict. The elders will establish an official file containing all the records pertaining to the hearing, including all pertinent correspondence, transcripts, and minutes. If he requests it, the accused will be given one copy of this file at the expense of the church. Any appeals to presbytery will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the CREC.

Excommunication will end when in the opinion, decided by a unanimous decision, 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.

VIII. Incorporation

As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ Church Tri-Cities is not constituted or incorporated by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church.

Although State bodies may recognize a particular church, Christ Church Tri-Cities affirms its status as fundamentally incorporated only by Christ as a matter of conscience.

Christ Church Tri-Cities has constituted herself, under the authority and headship of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an association of natural persons, and recognized as such by the laws of the State of Washington.

IX. Amendments

These articles may be amended at any time through a unanimous act of the elders, when the following conditions have been first fulfilled:

(1) The elders approve a draft of the proposed changes and make a copy of it available to the congregation at church.

(2) After the congregation has had at least two weeks to review the changes, the elders seek due consultation with the households of the church at a congregational meeting.

Adopted 2023

Revised 2024
Revised 2025