

# Bylaws of Reformation Presbyterian Church (Mesa, AZ)

(Adopted February 2, 2025)

## I. Preface

- A. The name of the church shall be *Reformation Presbyterian Church* (RPC).
- B. The name of the corporation organized to own the real and personal property of the church shall be *Reformation Presbyterian Church*.
- C. RPC exists to proclaim, maintain, and propagate the Christian faith and worship as infallibly revealed in the Holy Scriptures, outlined in the ancient creeds of the Church, and broadly summarized in the historic confessions of the Reformed churches.
- D. RPC is governed by its Constitution and by the following Bylaws.

## II. Officers of the Church

- A. The ecclesiastical offices of RPC shall be elders and deacons. The elders and deacons together shall be assigned the spiritual rule and care of the congregation as revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and summarized and described in RPC's Book of Church Order. The offices of elder and deacon are open only to male candidates who meet the requirements revealed in the Scriptures.
- B. The board of elders shall be known as the Session. The board of deacons shall be known as the Diaconate. The Session and Diaconate together shall be known as the Consistory.
- C. Nomination of candidates for the offices of elder and deacon may be made by the Session or any member of the congregation and must be submitted to the Session. The Session shall assess the gifts, calling, and prior experience of those nominated to church office and shall provide whatever training may be required for qualified candidates. Candidates certified by the Session shall be presented to the congregation for election. Officers shall be elected from the candidates by majority vote. Those elected shall be ordained by the Session and then installed by the Session (in the case of elders) or Consistory (in the case of deacons).
- D. Elders and Deacons shall be elected for lifetime service. An elder or deacon who wishes to retire from active service may be granted *emeritus* status by the Consistory if his service is judged to have been exemplary in its faithfulness. An officer emeritus retains his office in the Church and may exercise functions of that office, including voting, with the permission of the Consistory.

## III. Trustees of the Church

- A. The trustees of the corporation of RPC shall be chosen from among the elders and deacons. The trustees shall be assigned the civil, legal, and fiduciary responsibilities of the corporation. There shall be at least three trustees: the president, treasurer, and secretary. If the Consistory deems it prudent, additional trustees may also be elected.
- B. Trustees shall be chosen and elected by the Consistory for three year terms. Trustees shall hold office at the discretion of the Session and may be removed by a majority vote of the Session at any time without judicial action.

- C. The trustees shall exercise their duties to the corporation as a group—trustees have no individual or independent authority over the corporation—and in submission to the will and direction of the Session.

#### **IV. Meetings of the Congregation**

- A. The annual congregational meeting shall be normally held on the second Lord's Day in February.
- B. Fifty percent plus one of the voting households shall constitute a quorum at the congregational meeting.
- C. Voting members of the congregation shall be defined by household units with each household receiving one vote, usually exercised by the head of house. If the head of house is unable to be present or to vote, another member of the household may be recognized to vote for the household. If no member of the household is able to attend a congregational meeting, the household's vote may be registered by a formal, written communication to the Session indicating the vote to be cast no less than 24 hours prior to the scheduled meeting.
- D. Public notice of all meetings of the congregation, including time and place, must be given on two consecutive Lord's Days prior to the meeting, or with written notice being mailed to all members at least ten days in advance of the meeting.

#### **V. Meetings of the Corporation**

- A. The annual meeting of the corporation shall be held at the same time as the congregational meeting. Public notice of any other meetings of the corporation, including time and place, must be given on two consecutive Lord's Days prior to the meeting, or with written notice being mailed to all members at least ten days in advance of the meeting.
- B. The voting members of the congregation shall be voting members of the corporation.
- C. Fifty percent plus one (individual) of the voting members of the corporation shall constitute a quorum at the corporation meeting.
- D. The corporation shall deal with matters of property, indebtedness, and legal matters required by the State.

#### **VI. The Budget**

The budget shall be developed by the Consistory. The budget shall be adopted by the Session before the annual congregational meeting and shall be presented to the congregation for comment at that time. If amendments are suggested, the Consistory shall review and rule on them at a subsequent meeting of the Consistory.

#### **VII. Amendments**

These bylaws may be amended in whole or in part by a vote of two-thirds of the voting members of the corporation present at a corporation meeting, provided that notice of the proposed amendment(s) be given in writing to the Clerk of the Session and announced to the congregation at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

# **The Constitution of Reformation Presbyterian Church (Mesa, AZ)** *(Adopted March 5, 2025)*

## **Article I – Name and Purpose**

This congregation shall be known as Reformation Presbyterian Church (RPC). We confess in obedience to the Word of God that we exist to know, love, and follow Jesus Christ by exalting God, edifying believers, and evangelizing the world. We exalt God by establishing and maintaining the public worship of God in accordance with Holy Scripture. We edify believers by preaching the whole counsel of God, encouraging loving and joyful fellowship, and by maintaining the purity and peace of the Church through faithful discipline. We evangelize the world by proclaiming Christ first and foremost in our local community and, as we have opportunity, to all who will hear beyond it.

## **Article II – Beliefs**

### *Primary Standard*

We affirm the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments<sup>1</sup> to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, inerrant, infallible, our ultimate and final standard for faith and practice, and sufficient for all knowledge necessary for life and godliness.

### *Secondary Standards*

As subordinate to the Scriptures, we affirm the ancient, ecumenical creeds—the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, and the Definition of Chalcedon—as faithful summaries of the apostolic, historic, and orthodox doctrine of the Christian faith.

Furthermore, we sincerely receive, adopt, affirm, and uphold the historic confessions of the Reformed churches, specifically: the Westminster Confession of Faith (1789) and the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession [1561], the Heidelberg Catechism [1563], and the Canons of the Synod of Dort [1619]). We also receive the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms (1647) as faithful and helpful documents for teaching the Christian faith.

### *Honest Subscription*

Our officers and the congregation as a whole, though not every member of it, subscribe to the system of doctrine found in the above named Reformed standards.

## **Article III – Membership**

### *Section 1: Requirements for Membership*

1. Persons may be received into membership who:

---

<sup>1</sup> OT: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.  
NT: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude, Revelation.

- a. Have a credible profession of penitent faith in Jesus Christ, and
  - b. Have been baptized in the Name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and
  - c. Affirm the five membership vows, and
  - d. Are sincerely willing to submit to the discipline and instruction of the elders.
2. The children of one or more church members may also be received into membership:
    - a. Upon their baptism, and
    - b. Upon the affirmation of baptismal vows by their parent(s) or guardian(s).

*Section 2: Membership Procedure*

1. The elders are responsible for ensuring candidates meet the requirements for membership. Ordinarily, candidates will complete a membership class overseen by the elders. In every case, candidates must be interviewed by one or more elders and their application for membership reviewed and approved by the Session prior to reception.
2. The candidate having been approved, his name will be announced at least one Lord's Day prior to his reception into membership.
3. Ordinarily, the candidate will then publicly affirm the membership vows, usually in the context of a worship service. If circumstances prevent a public affirmation, the vows shall be affirmed in the presence of at least two elders who will then testify to the church of the candidate's affirmation of faith and submission.
4. After affirmation of the vows, the candidate will be enrolled as a member of the congregation.

*Section 3: Membership Vows*

1. Do you believe the whole Bible is the true Word of God and that its teaching is the only perfect, infallible, and essential doctrine of salvation?
2. Are you in agreement with the central doctrines found in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds and do you affirm that ancient faith as your own?
3. Do you confess that you are a sinner; that you are without excuse, without hope, and deserving of death, apart from Christ, because of your sins; and that you repent of your sin and trust for salvation, not in yourself, but in Jesus Christ alone?
4. Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Lord, and do you promise that, relying on God's grace, you will endeavor with all your might to serve Christ faithfully, forsake the world, resist the devil, put to death your sinful deeds and desires, and live a godly life?
5. Do you promise to participate faithfully in this church's worship, service, and fellowship, to submit to its governance, to heed its discipline, and to seek its purity and peace?
6. Congregation of the Lord Jesus, do you promise to love and care for [Name] as a brother/sister in Christ as we are commanded by God? If so, say, "Amen!"

*Section 4: Good Standing*

To remain in good standing, members must:

- (1) Remain in compliance with the membership vows (III.3), and

- (2) Regularly attend Sunday gatherings of the church as health and reasonable circumstances permit (Heb. 10:23-25), and
- (3) Financially support the church by regular offerings insofar as circumstances allow (1Cor. 16:1-2; 2Cor. 9:6-7), and
- (4) Continue in a life of repentance, pursuing holiness, upholding the purity and peace of the church, and endeavoring to obey the teachings of Scripture.

#### *Section 5: Member Households*

Member households shall be defined as one or more members who are self-governed and, ordinarily, independent. This may include families with two parents and children, single parents and children, single persons, divorced persons, and widows/widowers. If an elderly parent moves in with an adult child and both parent and child are members, each shall be given one household vote provided the parent is still of sound mind and judgment.<sup>2</sup> If an unmarried child moves out of his parent's house but remains largely financially dependent on his parent(s), he will still be counted as a member of his parent's household. When an adult child moves out of his parent's home and is self-governing and self-sustaining, he will affirm the membership vows and be counted as a new member household.

#### *Section 6: Termination of Membership*

Members may be removed from church membership:

1. By death
2. By excommunication
3. By transfer to a church of like faith and practice
4. By a letter of standing to a church not of like faith and practice
5. By erasure in the case of unresolved disappearance, persistent attendance at a church of which the Session cannot approve, or withdrawal from and renunciation of the church's jurisdiction

### **Article IV – Officers of the Church, Staff, and Responsible Parties**

#### *Section 1: Offices in the Church*

The ordinary and perpetual offices Christ has appointed in his Church are elders (a.k.a. presbyters, pastors, shepherds, overseers, and bishops) and deacons. The board of elders is known as the Session. The board of deacons is known as the Diaconate. The Session and Diaconate together is known as the Consistory.

Nomination of candidates for the offices of elder and deacon may be made by the Session or any member of the congregation and must be submitted to the Session. The Session shall assess the gifts, calling, and prior experience of those nominated to church office and shall provide whatever training may be required for qualified candidates. Those men certified by the Session shall be presented to the congregation for election. They shall be elected by

---

<sup>2</sup> This is based on the fact that a man is to "leave father and mother and cleave to his wife" (Gen. 2:24) and also to "honor father and mother" by providing physical and financial assistance in their old age (Matt. 15:3-6).

majority vote. Those elected shall be ordained by the Session and then installed by the Session (in the case of elders) or Consistory (in the case of deacons).

Elders and deacons shall be elected for lifetime service. An elder or deacon who wishes to step away from his official duties for a time may be granted a sabbatical by the Session in consultation with the Consistory for a designated period of time after which it will be reviewed and either extended or the officer returned to active duty. An elder or deacon who wishes to retire from active service may be granted *emeritus* status by the Session in consultation with the Consistory if his service is judged to have been exemplary in its faithfulness. An officer emeritus retains his office in the Church and may exercise functions of that office with the permission of the Session.

#### *Section 2: Elders*

The office of elder is restricted to men who meet specific, biblical qualifications (1Tim. 2:11-15; 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Elders shall be called and ordained by the Session after election by a majority of the congregation and after appropriate preparation, examination, and prayer. Elders are responsible to lead, rule, protect, teach, discipline, and pray for the flock as a group (Acts 20:28; 5:17-20; 1Pet. 5:1-5). Some elders are especially gifted, equipped, and called to “labor in the word and doctrine” (1Tim. 5:17). Those primarily devoted to the ministry of the word shall pursue a program of theological study, be approved by the Session for such a role, and, ordinarily, be examined and approved by the Presbytery. Elders must affirm and maintain their full subscription to the Scriptures and their honest subscription to the church’s secondary standards. If at any time their convictions vary from these subscriptions, they must inform the Session immediately and submit to the judgment of their fellow elders.

#### *Section 3: Deacons*

The office of deacon is restricted to men who meet specific, biblical qualifications (1Tim. 3:8-13). Deacons shall be called and ordained by the elders after election by a majority of the congregation and after appropriate preparation, examination, and prayer. Deacons may be charged with a variety of tasks, including congregational benevolence, but their primary job is to assist the elders so that the shepherds may be free to focus on the ministry of the word and prayer (Acts 6:1-8). Deacons must affirm and maintain their full subscription to the Scriptures and their honest subscription to the church’s secondary standards. If at any time their convictions vary from these subscriptions, they must inform the Session immediately and submit to its judgment.

Women may not be ordained to the office of deacon, but they may be appointed to serve in a variety of ways so long as they do not involve teaching or exercising authority over men (1Tim. 2:11-15; cf. 5:9-10; Acts 9:36; Luke 2:36-38).

#### *Section 4: The Session*

The Session, which is the governing body of the local church, consists of the elders. It shall choose its own moderator and clerk annually from among its members. The Session shall

convene at its regularly stated meetings, at the call of the moderator, or upon a call by any two members of the Session. A quorum of the Session is half of its active members. In no case may the Session conduct business with fewer than two present who are entitled to vote.

The Session is charged with maintaining the government of the congregation. It shall oversee all matters concerning the conduct of public worship and shall oversee efforts to promote the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation. It shall receive, dismiss, and exercise discipline over the members of the church, supervise the activities of the diaconate and the board of trustees, and have final authority over the use of the church property. The session also shall appoint commissioners to Presbytery.

The Session shall keep the following records: (1) minutes of its meetings, including a record of the administration of the sacraments and changes in the membership of the congregation; (2) minutes of the meetings of the congregation; and (3) rolls of the members of the congregation. Births, baptisms, censures, restorations, deaths, and removals shall be noted on these rolls.

#### *Section 5: The Diaconate*

The Diaconate consists of the deacons. The Diaconate shall convene at least quarterly, at the call of the Session, or upon a call by any two members of the Diaconate. A quorum of the Diaconate is half of its active members. In no case may the Diaconate conduct business with fewer than two present who are entitled to vote. The Diaconate is charged with assisting the Session by providing service to the congregation. The Diaconate shall report regularly to the Session regarding its ministry.

#### *Section 6: The Consistory*

The Consistory, which is the joint body of officers in the local church, consists of the elders and deacons. The moderator of the Session shall serve as moderator of the Consistory. The Consistory shall elect a treasurer for the church annually. The Consistory shall convene at its regularly stated meetings, at the call of the moderator, or upon a call by any two members of the Consistory. A quorum of the Consistory is half of its active members. In no case may the Consistory conduct business with fewer than two present who are entitled to vote.

The Consistory's specific duties are:

- Selecting and electing the church's treasurer annually (Bylaws III.B; Constitution IV.6)
- Developing an annual Budget and reviewing and adopting any amendments to it (Bylaws VI)
- Ordaining and installing Deacons (Constitution IV.1)
- Advising the Session regarding proposed sabbaticals (Constitution IV.1)
- Contracting, overseeing, and terminating any non-ordained staff (Constitution IV.8)
- Reviewing and ratifying amendments to the Constitution (Constitution X.1, 3)

*Section 7: Teaching within the Church*

Teachers in the Church shall be appointed and overseen by the Session after appropriate preparation, examination, and prayer. Women may be appointed as teachers of women and children, but in no case shall women be allowed to teach Scripture or theology to men in formal settings (1Tim. 2:11-15; 1Cor. 14:34-35). The teacher, curriculum, and manner of teaching in all classes and gatherings of the Church will be under the oversight and subject to the discipline of the Session. Those appointed to teaching roles must be men and women of exemplary character, conduct, and piety and who are well-prepared for the role and task assigned to them.

*Section 8: Additional Staff*

Additional staff, contractors, and service workers, including office, maintenance, and financial personnel, shall be sought, contracted, overseen, and, when necessary, terminated as needed by the Consistory.

*Section 9: Trustees*

Trustees shall be chosen by the Consistory from among the officers of the church and elected by the Consistory for three year terms. The trustees have no spiritual or ecclesiastical function in the church as trustees but are legal representatives appointed to satisfy the requirements of the State and assigned the civil, legal, and fiduciary responsibilities of the corporation. The duties of the trustees shall be defined, directed, and overseen by the Consistory. Trustees shall hold office at the discretion of the Session and may be removed by a majority vote of the Session at any time without judicial action.

**Article V – Congregational Meetings**

A Congregational Meeting shall be held at least once a year and when circumstances warrant it for information, discussion, and election of church officers. The meeting shall be open to all members of the church in good standing and shall be led by the elders or a representative they appoint. A quorum will be established and votes will be recorded by the number of households represented and not by individual persons in attendance.

The congregation shall vote to elect elders and deacons, on entering or withdrawing from denominational affiliation, to ratify changes to the by-laws, and where necessary to transact legal business as a corporation according to the by-laws. However, the church is ruled by the Session under the authority of Scripture. Therefore, congregational meetings are primarily for information and discussion of the church's business and not to determine that business or how it will be conducted, which decisions belong to the Session and Consistory. Changes to this Constitution will be made by the Session and submitted to the congregation for review but not for ratification.

Voting members of the congregation shall be defined by household with each household receiving one vote, usually exercised by the head of house. If the head of house is unable to be present or to vote, another member of the household may be recognized to vote for the



household. If a household consists of two adults (e.g. a husband and wife) and one is placed under discipline and suspended from communion, the other adult may still cast a household vote. If both adults are placed under discipline and suspended from communion, the household's vote is also suspended. The children of the household may not vote on behalf of the household in such cases regardless of their age.

Membership in the church will be normally reckoned by household; however, independent individuals may also be considered for membership. A household will be eligible when the male head of that household (Eph 5:22-24; Acts 16:15), a woman whose husband does not attend church (1 Cor. 7:12-14), or an individual (e.g. single and independent of father's house, widowed, divorced) meets the membership criteria and is approved by the Session.

Public notice of all meetings of the congregation, including time, place, and the matters to be discussed, must be given on two consecutive Lord's Days prior to the meeting, or with written notice being mailed to all members at least ten days in advance of the meeting. New business that was not previously announced may be introduced at a congregational meeting but may not be voted upon until a second meeting at least one week later.

A congregational meeting may be called by petition from one-fourth of the member households. All congregational meetings will be led by a member of the Session or by a man designated by the Session.

## **Article VI – Worship and Sacraments**

### *Section 1: Worship*

Worship is the act of praising and thanking God for his glory, grace, and goodness. The act of worship is initiated by God and consists of God meeting with his people in order to bless and strengthen them in their exercise of devotion.

The people of God should continually devote themselves to private worship, family worship, and corporate worship with the saints, but the primary event and duty of worship are the public assemblies of the local church on the Lord's Day. Corporate worship is a command of God to be continued in the Church until the return of Christ.

At least one corporate worship service on the Lord's Day, ordinarily, should be organized in terms of covenant renewal in which God *calls* his people into his presence, *cleanses* them as they confess their sins, *consecrates* them by his Word and Spirit, *communes* with them at the holy Table, and *commissions* them to go forth and build Christ's kingdom by being faithful in their respective callings.

Local churches should celebrate the Lord's Supper every first day of the week unless prevented by providential circumstances.

Worship belongs to God and glorifies God. Therefore, only what God has commanded in his word ought to be done in the church's services of corporate worship.

*Section 2: The Sacraments*

There are two sacraments of the Christian Church: baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Baptism is the rite of initiation administered with water in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Baptism visibly unites a person to the Body of Christ and signifies and seals the washing away of sins, regeneration, and membership in the Covenant of Grace.

Ordinarily, baptism shall be administered in the presence of the church in a stated service on the Lord's Day. Exceptions may be made, at the discretion of the Session, in cases of illness, infirmity, or unavoidable absence (e.g. incarceration, hospitalization).

When a professing believer is to be baptized, he or she shall be asked to affirm the five vows of membership before the congregation or those in attendance.

When a covenant child of immature years or knowledge is to be baptized, the parent(s) of the child shall be asked the following questions:

- (1) Do you acknowledge that although our children are conceived and born in sin and therefore are subject to condemnation, they are holy in Christ by virtue of the covenant of grace, and as children of the covenant are to be baptized?
- (2) Do you promise to teach diligently to [name of child] the principles of our holy Christian faith, revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church?
- (3) Do you promise to pray regularly with and for [name of child], and to set an example of piety and godliness before (him/her)?
- (4) Do you promise to endeavor, by all the means that God has appointed, to bring [name of child] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, encouraging (him/her) to appropriate for (himself/herself) the blessings and fulfill the obligations of the covenant?
- (5) Congregation of the Lord Jesus, do you promise to love and care for [Name] as a brother/sister in Christ as we are commanded by God? If so, say, "Amen!"

The Lord's Supper (or Eucharist) is the rite of continuation consisting of the eating of bread and drinking of wine in accordance with Christ's instructions in Matthew 26: ; Mark 14: ; Luke 22 ; and 1 Corinthians 10: and 11:17-34. The Eucharist nourishes and strengthens our faith in Christ and the assurance of grace. It signifies and seals our communion with Christ.

We believe that all the members of Christ's Body, except in cases of ecclesiastical discipline, ought to partake of Christ's Body and Blood. Therefore, Reformation Presbyterian Church permits all weaned, baptized children to partake of the holy Supper.

Ordinarily, a Christian must be a member in good standing of a local church to be permitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. Exceptions may be made for those seeking membership or in other cases at the discretion of the Session. No person who is unbaptized shall be allowed to partake of the holy Supper.

## **Article VII – Church Discipline**

### *Section 1: The Nature and Purposes of Discipline*

1. Ecclesiastical discipline is the exercise of that authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has committed to the visible church for the preservation of its purity, peace, and good order.
2. Administrative discipline is concerned with the maintenance of good order in the government of the church in other than judicial cases. The purpose of its exercise is that all rights may be preserved and all obligations faithfully discharged.
3. Judicial discipline is concerned with the prevention and correction of offenses, an offense being defined as anything in the doctrine or practice of a member of the church which is contrary to the Word of God. The purpose of judicial discipline is to vindicate the honor of Christ, to promote the purity of his church, and to reclaim the offender.
4. All members of the church, including baptized children, are under the care of the church, and subject to ecclesiastical discipline including administrative and judicial discipline.

### *Section 2: General Principles for Ecclesiastical Discipline*

1. As Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by the authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censure, to reconcile the sinner with the Church and with his neighbour, and to remove the offense out of the Church of Christ.
2. If anyone transgresses against the purity of doctrine or godliness of conversation, as long as it is of a private character and has not given public offense, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed.
3. Secret sins of which the sinner repent after being admonished by one person in private or in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be laid before the Session.
4. If anyone, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public sin, the matter shall be reported to the Session.

5. Repentance, reconciliation, and restoration after public sins or matters in which discipline has been made known to the Church shall likewise be made known to the Church with thanksgiving to God.

6. Those who obstinately reject the admonition of the Session or those who have committed gross or public sins deserving of severe correction shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper.

7. When a member who has been suspended from the Supper continues to remain impenitent and refuses to heed the counsel and admonition of the Church, he shall be finally excommunicated and considered no longer a member of the Body of Christ and to have no part in the gifts of salvation.

### *Section 3: Preliminary Steps for Judicial Process*

1. A charge of an offense may be brought by any member of the church against any member of the church but must be approved and adopted by the Session for a trial to proceed. The offense alleged in the charge must be serious enough to warrant a trial. No charge shall be admitted against an elder unless brought by two or more witnesses (1Tim. 5:19).

2. No charge shall be admitted by the Session if it is filed more than two years after the commission of the alleged offense, unless it appears that unavoidable impediments have prevented an earlier filing of the charge.

3. Every charge of an offense must: (a) be in written form, (b) name the alleged offense(s) seriatim, (c) provide references to relevant passages from the Word of God and, if appropriate, applicable sections of the confessional standards, (d) set forth the serious nature of the offense which would demonstrate the warrant for a trial.

4. Every charge of an offense must also include specification of the facts which sustain the charge. Specifications should: (a) be in written form, (b) declare as far as possible, the time, place, and circumstances of the alleged offense, (c) be accompanied with the names of any witnesses and references to any supporting documents and evidence to be produced.

5. Offenses are either public or private. Public offenses are those which are commonly or widely known. Private offenses are those which are known to an individual only, or, at most, to a very few individuals. Private offenses may or may not be personal, a personal private offense being one which involves injury to the person bringing the charge.

6. When a member of the church is about to present a charge, he shall be solemnly warned by the Session that he may be censured if an investigation determines that the charge was frivolous, known by the accuser to be untrue, or malicious in nature. No charge shall be investigated by the Session unless the principles of Matthew 18:15-17 have been faithfully observed and upheld insofar as appropriate given the nature of the offense.

7. The Session shall conduct a preliminary investigation to determine whether the charge(s) should be adopted and judicial process instituted. A special committee may be appointed for this purpose, but its findings shall always be reviewed by the Session. The investigation shall consider: (1) the form and substance of the charge; (2) the form and relevancy of the specifications; (3) the competency of the witnesses named in the specifications; (4) the apparent authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any supporting documents and evidence adduced in support of the charge and specifications; (5) whether the specifications, if true, would support the charge; and (6) also, whether the charge, if proved true, would constitute an offense serious enough to warrant a trial.

An offense which is serious enough to warrant a trial is: (1) an offense in the area of conduct and practice which seriously disturbs the peace, purity, and/or unity of the church, or (2) an offense in the area of doctrine for the non-ordained member which would constitute a denial of a credible profession of faith as reflected in his membership vows, or (3) an offense in the area of doctrine for the ordained officer which would constitute a violation of the system of doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures and summarized in the secondary standards.

8. If the Session adopts the charge(s), it shall fix the time, date, and place for the trial of the case and shall cite the accused to appear at that time. The first meeting of the trial shall occur no less than one week and no more than one month after the accused is cited, unless aggravating circumstances warrant postponement to a later date.

#### *Section 4: Rules for a Judicial Trial*

##### 1. Regarding the Session

a. At the beginning of every trial, the moderator shall announce:

This body is about to sit in a judicial capacity and I exhort you, the members, to bear in mind your solemn duty faithfully to minister and declare the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, and to subordinate all human judgments to that infallible rule. Moreover, I charge you to act as shepherds of the Church of God which our Lord purchased with his own blood and to bear in the mind the words of our Lord who taught us: "Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

This announcement shall be repeated at the beginning of each subsequent meeting of the trial.

b. Trials of the church shall ordinarily be conducted with open doors. In every case involving a charge against an elder, the trial must be conducted with open doors. In other cases, where the circumstances of the alleged offense(s) and the goals of church discipline make it prudent, the Session may determine to conduct all or part of the trial in executive session by a vote of three-fourths of the members present. This decision shall not be done so as to deprive the accused of his right to confront the witnesses against him.

c. No person shall be deprived of the right to set forth, plead, or offer in evidence in accordance with the provisions of the Word of God and the secondary standards.

d. If aggravated circumstances warrant it, the Session may deny an accused person the right of participating in the Lord's Supper or of performing the functions of his office until the case is concluded.

e. If the accused refuses or fails to appear without satisfactory reason for his absence at the time appointed for the trial of the case, he shall again be cited, with the warning that, if he does not appear, it will proceed with the trial in his absence. This second meeting shall be scheduled not less than one week and not more than one month after the second citation, unless aggravating circumstances warrant postponement to a later date.

f. The Session shall keep: (a) a roll of the members attending each session of the trial, (b) a complete and accurate record of the trial, including the charge(s), specifications, and minutes of the proceedings, as well as all rulings and decisions of the Session. These minutes, together with all relevant papers, shall be delivered to the Presbytery in cases of appeal.

## 2. Regarding the Accused

a. The accused shall be entitled to the assistance of counsel. Counselor(s) in judicial trials must be baptized members in good standing of a church which recognizes RPC and which is recognized by the Session as a faithful church and must agree to abide by rulings of the Session, notwithstanding the right to appeal. If the accused cannot find a counselor to assist him in the trial, the Session shall appoint a member to act on his behalf.

b. The accused (and his counsel) may take exception to any and all rulings or decisions made by the Session in the trial. The Session shall rule on any objections raised during the proceedings.

c. The accused shall be allowed one copy of the minutes and documents of the trial.

## 3. Regarding Witnesses

a. Any person may be a witness in a judicial case if the Session is satisfied that he has sufficient competence to make the affirmation required of witnesses (VII.iii.3.b.)

b. The moderator shall require each witness before he testifies to affirm:  
“I solemnly swear, that by the grace of God, I will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth concerning the matters on which I am called to testify.”

c. Testimony may be delivered at trial from prior deposition of witnesses provided the witness's testimony is delivered under oath and is accurately recorded. The accused (and his counsel) shall be entitled to object to testimony by deposition if the witness is unavailable to cross-examination or impossible to rebut due to it consisting of unsubstantiated assertions.

d. Both the Session and the accused will be entitled to call witnesses and shall require them to appear through notice given at least one week prior to the trial. The accused shall be granted citations in which he may insert the names of the witnesses whom he wishes the trial judicatory to summon.

#### 4. Rules for Evidence and Witness Testimony

a. Evidence must be factual in nature. It may be direct or circumstantial. Caution should be exercised in giving weight to evidence which is purely circumstantial.

b. The accused may object to the competency of any witness and the authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any testimony or evidence produced in support of the charge and specifications. The trial judicatory shall decide on all such objections after allowing the accused to be heard in support thereof.

c. A specification presented in support of a charge may be established by the testimony of witnesses or by duly authenticated documentary evidence. The testimony of one witness shall not be sufficient to establish the truth of any specification.

d. If the accused so requests, no witness, unless a member of the judicatory, called to witness regarding facts in support of any specification shall testify in the presence of another witness who is to testify concerning the same specification.

e. The trial judicatory shall appoint one of its members to conduct the examination of witnesses on its behalf, but other members shall also have the right to take part in the examination. Witnesses produced in support of the charge and specifications shall testify in the presence of the accused unless the accused has failed to present himself and is being tried in *absentia*.

f. Witnesses named in the specifications shall first be examined by the trial judicatory. The accused may then cross-examine. If the trial judicatory asks any further questions, the accused shall be given opportunity for recross-examination.

g. Witnesses summoned at the request of the accused shall first be examined by the accused. If the trial judicatory cross-examines, the accused shall be given opportunity to conduct a redirect examination. Leading questions shall be permitted only under cross-examination.

h. Certified records of a judicatory shall be received in evidence in any other judicatory if their relevancy is first established.

i. All questions concerning the competency of any witness and the authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any testimony or evidence taken by a commission shall be determined by the trial judicatory after the accused has been given an opportunity to be heard.

j. New evidence discovered during the trial may be offered, but, if such evidence is produced against the accused, he shall be given reasonable time to investigate it and to supplement his defense.

k. If new evidence is produced by the accused after he has been found guilty, the trial judicatory shall examine such evidence. If it is satisfied that there was good reason for not producing it at the trial, it shall grant a new trial, or, in case an appeal has been lodged, it shall certify these facts to the appellate judicatory and the record of the case shall then be returned to the trial judicatory for the purpose of a new trial.

## 5. Rules of Trial Proceedings

### 1. First Meeting of the Trial

At the first meeting of the trial judicatory the following actions shall be taken:

a. The charges and specifications shall be read and formally presented to the accused together with the names of any witnesses and copies of any documents which may be presented against him.

b. The accused will be given the opportunity to interpose objections concerning (1) the regularity of the proceedings up to this point and (2) the form of the charge, the form and relevancy of the specifications, the competency of the witnesses named in the specifications, and the authenticity, admissibility, and relevancy of any documents, records, and recordings submitted in support of the charge and specifications. The trial judicatory shall determine the validity of any such objections. If the accused at this point requests the trial judicatory to do so, it shall determine whether the proof of the charge and specifications would show the commission of an offense serious enough to warrant a trial. It may dismiss the case forthwith, or permit such amendments of the charge and specifications as do not alter their essential nature.

c. The accused (or his counsel) may request a delay in order to more fully examine the charging documents and prepare such objections. The judicatory shall rule on whether a postponement is warranted, and if so, shall set the date, time, and place of a second meeting.

d. If the trial judicatory decides that the trial should proceed, the accused shall be called on to plead "guilty" or "not guilty," and his plea shall be entered upon the record. If the accused pleads "guilty," the trial judicatory shall determine the censure.



If the accused pleads “not guilty,” or refuses to enter a plea, the trial shall proceed. The proceedings described in this section may extend over as many meetings as are necessary for their completion.

e. A quorum of half the members of the Session is necessary to conduct a trial. In no case may less than two elders oversee conduct of a trial. If only one elder is available or eligible to participate in the trial judicatory, then another elder from a church of which the Session approves shall augment the trial judicatory.

f. An elder may recuse himself from serving as a member of the trial judicatory if he believes his involvement or relationship to the case would bias his judgment. No elder who is accused may sit in judgment of his own trial. No elder may be disqualified on the basis of being a witness in the trial.

## 2. Subsequent Meetings of the Trial

a. If a member of the judicatory is absent from any meeting of the trial after a plea has been entered and evidence has begun to be presented (i.e. after all steps prior to VII.C.1.d.), that member shall be disqualified from voting on the outcome or being counted in the computation of a quorum. He may, however, attend subsequent meetings and participate in the presentation and deliberation of evidence and the examination of witnesses.

b. When all the evidence against the accused has been presented and he has had an opportunity to cross-examine the witnesses testifying against him, the accused shall have the right to move for the dismissal of the charges. If this motion is denied by the trial judicatory, the accused may then present the evidence in support of his defense.

c. At the conclusion of the defense’s presentation, a closing argument will be permitted to him.

## 3. Conclusion of the Trial

a. When all of the evidence has been presented and the accused has made his final argument, the trial judicatory shall vote on each charge separately. If the trial judicatory decides that the accused is guilty, it shall proceed to determine the censure.

b. The defendant having been found guilty shall be notified of the proposed censure and advised of his right to appeal the decision of the judicatory to Presbytery. If he wishes to appeal, the defendant shall submit written notice of his intention to appeal to the Session no more than ten days after the conclusion of the trial proceedings. The censure shall not be formally announced to the defendant or publicly announced to the church until the ten day period has expired, unless the defendant waives his right to an appeal. If the defendant waives his right to appeal, the censure shall be pronounced and made effective immediately.

c. The censure and its pronouncement as well as any decision to file an appeal or to waive the right to appeal shall be recorded in the minutes of the trial.

#### 4. Trial in Absentia

a. If the judicatory proceeds with the trial in the absence of the accused, a counsel shall be appointed to present a case to the trial judicatory in defense of the accused. Such counsel, although not acting directly in behalf of the accused, shall be entitled to present evidence, interview witnesses, interpose objections, and otherwise act in defense of the accused. The trial judicatory shall deliver copies of the charge, specifications, and names of witnesses either personally or by certified mail to the accused along with notification that the trial is proceeding without him along with exhortation to attend and participate in his defense. If the accused does not attend or participate in the proceedings, the trial will be conducted as though the accused entered a plea of “not guilty.” When the trial judicatory has concluded its deliberations, it shall communicate its judgment to the accused in writing either personally or by certified mail.

#### 5. Cases without Full Process

When a person comes before a judicatory as his own accuser, the judicatory may proceed to judgment without full process, determining first, what offense, if any has been committed, and, if a serious offense has been committed, what censure shall be pronounced.

#### *Section 5: Censure and Restoration*

##### A. Censure

1. In judicial discipline there are five degrees of censure: admonition, rebuke, suspension, deposition, and excommunication. Censures shall be pronounced in the name and by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an act of the whole church, by the moderator on behalf of the trial judicatory.

2. If a person who has been adjudged guilty refuses or fails to present himself for censure at the time appointed, the trial judicatory shall cite him to appear at another time. If he does not appear after this citation, the censure shall be pronounced in his absence.

##### B. Degrees of Censure

###### 1. Admonition

Admonition consists in tenderly and solemnly confronting the offender with his sin, warning him of his danger, and exhorting him to repentance and to greater fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

###### 2. Rebuke

Rebuke is a form of censure more severe than admonition. It consists in setting forth the serious character of the offense, reproving the offender, and exhorting him to repentance and to more perfect fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

### 3. Suspension

a. Suspension is a form of censure by which one is deprived of the privileges of membership in the church, of office, or of both. Suspension of an officer from the privileges of membership shall always be accompanied by suspension from office, but the latter does not necessarily involve the former.

b. When any officer is suspended, the congregation and the Presbytery shall be immediately notified after the time for filing an appeal has expired.

c. When a member guilty of public or heinous sins which bring scandal upon the Church is suspended, the congregation shall be immediately notified after the time for filing an appeal has expired.

d. When a member is suspended for original offenses that do not constitute public or heinous sin, there shall be three levels of censure.

(1) The offender shall be suspended from the Table and the privileges of Church membership, but his guilt and change in status shall not be announced to the congregation.

(2) If after a period of not more than three months after censure is pronounced he has not manifested sufficient evidence of repentance, the Session shall publicly announce his name to the congregation and his current suspension as a further admonition and to call for broader prayer for his repentance.

(3) If after a period of not more than six months after censure is pronounced he still has not manifested sufficient evidence of repentance but continues to resist the counsel and admonition of the Church, the Session shall move to public excommunication.

### 4. Deposition

a. Deposition is a form of censure consisting in a solemn declaration by the trial judicatory that the offender is no longer an officer in the church.

b. When an officer is deposed from his office, the Session shall immediately notify the Presbytery.

### 5. Excommunication

Excommunication is the most severe form of censure and is resorted to only in cases of offenses aggravated by persistent impenitence. It consists in a solemn declaration

by the Session, speaking on behalf of the Church, that the offender is no longer considered a member of the body of Christ.

### C. Procedural Considerations

#### 1. Pronouncement of Censure

a. The suspension, deposition, or excommunication of an officer of the church shall be announced to the congregation. These censures shall be accompanied by prayer that God may graciously use the discipline for the restoration of the offender, the edification of the church, and his own glory.

b. The further suspension, deposition, or excommunication of a member shall be announced to the church. These censures shall always be accompanied by prayer to God that he may graciously use the discipline for the restoration of the offender, the edification of the church, and his own glory.

#### 2. Increase of Censure

a. No further trial is necessary to increase the censure of suspension from office to deposition or the censure of suspension from the privileges of church membership to excommunication.

b. If increase of censure is imposed, without further trial, it shall be the duty of the judicatory so acting to record the circumstances in its minutes.

c. The judgment to increase censure shall be subject to appeal.

### D. Restoration

1. If the Session is satisfied of the penitence of the offender, the censure shall be removed and the offender shall be restored. This restoration shall be accompanied by a solemn admonition. Restoration to the privileges of membership may take place without restoration to those of office. Restoration shall always be accompanied by a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his redeeming grace.

2. An officer deposed because of a commonly known offense shall be restored only after the judicatory has assured itself that the restoration will not be attended by injury to the cause of the gospel. An officer who has been deposed cannot resume his former office without again being ordained.

#### *Section 6: Erasure from the Membership Roll*

Erasure is an act of administrative discipline without full process. The names of members may be removed from the roll of the church by erasure according to the following provisions:

1. When a member desires dismissal to a church of which the session cannot approve as a church of like faith and practice, nor a church which will advance his spiritual

interests, and he cannot be dissuaded, it shall grant him a letter of standing, unless the session institutes disciplinary action against him; on being informed that he has joined such a church the clerk shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

2. When a member, whether or not he be charged with an offense, informs the session that he does not desire to remain in the fellowship of the Church, and the efforts of the session to dissuade him from his course have failed, it shall erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes, unless the session institutes or continues other disciplinary action against him. He shall be informed of the spiritual and ecclesiastical implications of such a decision, that he is removing himself from the Body of Christ and separating himself from the communion of salvation.

3. When a member unites with another church without a letter of dismissal, the session may erase his name from the roll and record the circumstances in its minutes.

4. When a member ceases to attend the stated services of the church, without adequate reason, or persists in attending another church in preference to his own, without communication with and consent from the Session, then after this situation has continued six months, the Session will, ordinarily, send a letter urging the member to find a church where he can submit to and participate in a true relationship of fellowship and accountability. The letter will require the member to contact the Session within two weeks to explain his absence and provide reasons if they wish to remain as a member. If the member does not respond within two weeks or the Session is unpersuaded to retain his membership, his name will be removed from the membership roll.

5. When a covenant child neglects the ongoing exhortation of the session to profess faith in Christ and rejects the covenantal responsibility of submission to home or church, the session may upon prior notification erase his name from the roll.

6. All erasures shall be communicated to the congregation by written announcement.

#### *Section 7: Appeals*

1. An appeal in a judicial case is the removal of the case from the local Session to the Presbytery by the accuser filing of a petition asking that the final judgment of the Session be reversed or modified.

2. Decisions and rulings made by the Session during the course of the trial shall not be appealable but may be assigned as grounds of appeal from the final judgment of the judicatory.

3. Notice of an intention to appeal must be filed in writing, within ten days after the judgment has been determined, with the clerk or the moderator of the Session.
4. The clerk of the Session shall submit the entire record of the case, including the chronology, to the clerk or appropriate officer of the Presbytery.

#### *Section 8: Dissents, Protests, and Complaints*

1. Any member of a judicatory who is entitled to vote on a question and who votes against the action or judgment of the judicatory thereon may request that his vote be recorded in the minutes of the judicatory.
2. Any member of a judicatory may file a written protest stating his reasons for objecting to an action or judgment of the judicatory. A protest must be filed with the moderator or clerk within ten days after the judicatory has taken the action or announced the judgment. A protest shall be read to the judicatory and shall be recorded in the minutes.
3. The judicatory may, if it so desires, place in its minutes an answer to a protest.
4. A complaint is a written representation, other than an appeal or a protest, charging a judicatory with delinquency or error. It may be brought by an officer or other member of the church against the Session.
5. A complaint shall first be presented to the Session with specific requests to correct the error. The complaint shall be presented as soon as possible after the alleged delinquency or error, and always within three months, unless it is shown that it could not have been presented within that time.
6. If, after considering a complaint, the Session is not convinced that it has been delinquent or has erred, and refuses to make amends, the complainant may appeal to the Presbytery.

### **Article VIII – Presbyterian Polity and Denominational Affiliation**

#### *Section 1: Presbyterian Polity*

Reformation Presbyterian Church is committed to the principles of Reformed theology and Presbyterian polity. The congregation will be elder-ruled by a plurality of qualified, ordained elders and will seek to maintain fellowship in a denomination or confederation committed to presbyterian and reformed government. This includes participation in the fellowship and work of regional churches (Presbytery/Classis) and submission to it in matters of judicial decision and appeal.

#### *Section 2: Denominational Affiliation*

Reformation Presbyterian Church voted in December 2024 to pursue membership in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC), which process is underway.

## **Article IX – Catholicity and Ecumenicity**

Reformation Presbyterian Church is committed to biblical principles of catholicity and ecumenicity. While acknowledging the Reformed tradition to most faithfully expound and express the teachings of Scripture and the Christian faith, we acknowledge all who have been baptized in the Name of the Triune God, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and affirm the substance of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds to be our brothers and sisters in the faith and members of the Church of the Lord Jesus, unless they have been excommunicated. We seek to manifest, affirm, and participate in that broader fellowship of the catholic Church insofar as providence and prudence allow within the bounds of conscience and discretion.

## **Article X – Amendments**

This Constitution may be amended by the following process:

1. Amendments are proposed to the Session and reviewed by the Consistory for no less than two weeks.
2. The proposed amendment(s) shall be passed by a two-thirds majority of the Session.
3. The amendment(s) shall be ratified by a two-third majority of the Consistory not less than one month after the first vote.
4. The adopted amendment(s) shall then be communicated to the congregation.