



CHRIST CHURCH SEARCY, ARKANSAS CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

Preamble

The purpose of the Church is to glorify the one, true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Church is called to reverent worship, proclaim Christ to the world, and make disciples. The scriptures call for these to be accomplished through the means of preaching and observing the sacraments, teaching the whole counsel of scripture, developing a strong fellowship, tending to the needs of her membership and the broader culture, and doing all things decently and in order.

To these ends, we establish the following constitution.

Name and Identity

The name of this Christian fellowship of believers is Christ Church. This Church is Evangelical in that it holds to the essential truths of Biblical orthodoxy; Reformed in that it holds to the biblical gospel of sovereign grace rediscovered in the Protestant Reformation; and, God willing, ever-reforming according to the Word of God (Acts 20:27). This Church is Catholic in that we rejoice with the communion of the saints, throughout the ages, affirm the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and trace our roots through the Reformers and Medieval saints, through the church fathers and apostles, through the faithful prophets and servants of the old covenant, all the way to back the protoevangelion of Genesis 3:15. The story of God's people in the world is our story.

As Catholics, we lament the fractured state of the Church in our day, we join our prayers to those of Jesus that all those the Father has given him might be one in love, and we labor to manifest our unity with all other faithful Christians in whatever ways possible. We affirm that genuine catholicity means unity in the truth, and so we endeavor to seek both the peace and purity of the Church, without compromise. We affirm that the unity Christ calls us to already exists in principle, but should also be made manifest in the ministry, mission, and polity of the global church. We deny that catholicity requires us to sacrifice our convictions, rooted in Scripture and the historic Christian tradition, in order to serve an ecumenical agenda. We view the CREC as a confederation of churches within the catholic Church; as a subset of the broader catholic Church, we desire to see ever greater unity with other churches and collections of churches, in doctrine, government, and mission.

We believe that the Holy Bible is God's inspired, inerrant revelation to man and is the only certain, sufficient, and infallible rule from which we draw all saving knowledge. All of our creeds, confessions, and Church documents are tried by His Word.

We will strive to believe, preach, and teach doctrine that accord with the Holy Word of God. The Bible is our final authority. Insofar as historical creeds and confessions of faith reflect true Biblical teaching, we embrace the following: the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and what is referred to as the Modern Evangelical Confession as found in the appendices of this constitution. Though we expect agreement on the Creeds of the Church, members who take any exceptions to the Modern Evangelical Confession should make these exceptions known to the session prior to joining Christ Church.

Membership

Individuals are eligible for membership in Christ Church if they have been scripturally baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) and they live in our geographical area. Individuals become members upon taking covenant membership vows (Philemon 2; Heb. 13:7, 17) normally in the context of a service of covenant renewal. Children of members become members when they are baptized. The elders oversee a membership list, which must include names, baptisms, and communicant status.

The vows include:

- “Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in need of salvation by Christ, and do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving and resting upon Him alone as He is offered in the gospel?”
- “Have you been baptized in accordance with His Word?”
- “Do you swear in the name of God, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to live in a way that becomes followers of Christ?”
- “Do you swear in the name of God to support the ministry of this church in its worship and work, submitting to its government and discipline, while pursuing its purity and peace?”

Upon receiving affirmative responses to all these the elder will charge the both the new member and the congregation regarding their responsibilities and privileges in the local Body of Christ. Following this reminder the officiant will address the congregation:

- “Members of Christ Church, you are called to welcome (new member's name) into our fellowship with open arms, and you are charged to receive them as your own brother/sister, to pray for them, to encourage them in the faith, to bless them with warm hospitality, to comfort them in sorrows and trials, and to guard their lives and reputations as your very own.
- Signify your promise and covenant to do so, welcome them, and renew your own membership vows with a hearty “Amen.”

As necessary, individuals may come under our pastoral care without coming into membership.

Release or Transfer of Membership

The elders will normally release with a blessing all members who request to be released to the care of another Christian church. If such request is made when there are disciplinary proceedings against that member or household, the elders will normally delay the release until the disciplinary matter is resolved. If members move from our geographical area or otherwise cease attendance 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 will normally be released from membership.

Communicant Members

All individuals are eligible for the Lord’s Supper at Christ Church if they have been scripturally baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19). Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the sacraments remains with the elders.

Christ Church understands the scriptures to teach what are commonly referred to as Paedobaptism and Paedocommunion. All offices shall hold to these positions. The same is not required of membership. The elders exercise this responsibility for children taking into account the positions of parents and the requirements of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

Election of Pastors, Elders, and Deacons

Elections will be held for the ordained offices of the church. Voting will be conducted by household, with each household casting one vote. A vote is extended to all households in good standing, not under discipline, as qualified by the elders. Independent, unmarried members are considered households for purposes of voting.

The elders will examine nominees for church office with regard to their doctrine and manner of life. A nominee must notify the elders if he has any disagreement or mental reservation about any portion of the church's Confession of Faith or this constitution. He must meet the qualifications for the office set forth in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Nominees are approved for candidacy by unanimous consent of the elders. Nominees must work through a short course of training under the oversight of the minister prior to being presented as a candidate for election.

A candidate for deacon will serve among the deacons for a trial period in order to prove his fitness for office (1 Tim. 3:10). The elders may then present the candidate for election.

The elders must present candidates to the congregation at least three weeks prior to an election. If, after carefully weighing the electors' input, the elders determine that the candidate has the clear and obvious support of the church (Phil. 2:1-4), the elders will ordain him through laying on of hands and prayer (Acts 6:6; 1 Timothy 4:14, 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6).

When ordained, the deacon will vow:

1. "DO you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?"
2. "DO you sincerely receive and adopt the doctrinal standards of this church, being set forth in our Book of Confessions, as your own confession of faith, and as a faithful statement of the doctrine taught in the Scriptures?"
3. "If at any time you find yourself out of accord with any point in our Book of Confessions, WILL you, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of these vows?"
4. "WILL you be diligent, with God's help, to frame and fashion yourself and your household, according to the Doctrine of Christ; and make both yourself and your household examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?"
5. "DO you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?"
6. "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?"
7. "DO you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?"
8. "DO you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the church?"

When ordained, an elder will affirm the following vows:

1. WILL you shepherd the flock of God committed to your charge, as one who must give account, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly, not for filthy lucre but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being but being examples to the flock?
2. DO you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
3. DO you sincerely receive and adopt the doctrinal standards of this church, being set forth in

our Book of Confessions, as your own confession of faith, and as a faithful statement of the doctrine taught in the Scriptures?

4. If at any time you find yourself out of accord with any point in our Book of Confessions, WILL you, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of these vows?

5. WILL you be diligent, with God's help, to frame and fashion yourself and your household, according to the Doctrine of Christ; and to make both yourself and your household wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ?

6. DO you approve of the form of government and discipline of this church, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?

7. DO you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord, unto whom is committed the charge and government over you; following with a glad mind and will their godly admonitions, and submitting yourselves to their godly judgments?

Additional Vows to be taken by Teaching Elders:

1. WILL you instruct the people committed to your charge; and to teach nothing as necessary to eternal salvation, but that which may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?

2. WILL you be diligent to read and exercise yourself in the Holy Scriptures, and call upon God by prayer for the true understanding of the same; so that you may be able by them to teach and exhort with wholesome Doctrine, and to withstand and convince the gainsayers?

3. ARE you ready, with all faithful diligence, to banish and drive away from the Church all erroneous and strange doctrine contrary to God's Word, and teach others to the same?

4. DO you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel and the purity and peace and unity of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?

Additional Vows to be taken by Ministers of the Word and Sacrament:

1. WILL you give your faithful diligence always so to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments, and the Discipline of Christ, as the Lord hath commanded, and as this Church hath received the same, so that you may shepherd the people committed to your Cure and Charge with all diligence, leading them to keep and observe the same?

2. WILL you be ready, with all faithful diligence, to use both public and private admonitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole, within your Cure and Charge, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given?

Once ordained, the elder or deacon will serve for life, unless he resigns or is removed.

Should the church ever be without a minister it should secure one without delay (Mt. 9:36). The elders will seek out suitable nominees as necessary, examining a nominee with regard to his doctrine, manner of life, and confessional adherence. In addition to the qualifications for elder, ministers must meet the biblical criteria for shepherd (2 Samuel 12:1ff., Ps. 23, John 10:11-16, etc.). Therefore the nominee must also preach before the congregation and submit to a public interview before the electors.

Following this process, the elders by unanimous vote 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 election, the elders will extend a provisional call to him to be pastor. His call to be pastor is finalized only after he is duly

approved by the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. Following CREC approval, he may be ordained (if necessary) and installed as a pastor.

Duties of Deacons

Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons are responsible to manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church. The deacons also assist the elders in worship, pastoral care, evangelism and church administration (Acts 6:2-4).

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 and at each meeting of electors, they will provide regular financial reports and proposals to the elders.

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.

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, approve the annual budget, and serve as trustees and signatories for property and other transactions. 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 their regular meeting, or at special meetings called for the purpose. The elders will rotate the responsibility of chairing meetings, and will appoint a secretary to 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.

The session contains three distinct callings or offices. The first is called to a pastoral ministry of the Word, and called by us a minister or pastor (Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 1 Tim. 5:17). A second is called to a didactic ministry of the Word, called by us a teacher or doctor (1 Cor. 12:28; James 3:1). A third is called to government and rule according to the Word, called by us a ruler or ruling elder (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7,17; Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28), which function is shared by all elders. Each elder will have his calling and office acknowledged by the elders in session. In all meetings of the session of presbyters, each elder has one vote.

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).

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. The elders will notify the congregation of their receipt of the letter and schedule a meeting of electors. If the desire of the elder or deacon concerned is unchanged by the 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.

Removal of Elders and Deacons

If an 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 elders where they would be allowed to present their case (1 Tim. 5:19). If the elders (excepting for the one in question) unanimously decide that the case has merit, that elder, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to the correction, will be rebuked in the presence of the electors (1 Tim. 5:20), or will be removed from the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), or both. A removed officer may contest the decision by referring the matter to Wycliffe Presbytery of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches for binding arbitration.

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 unanimous judgment 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 member may be disciplined by the church. Un-baptized children of 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 Christ Church, the elders will ordinarily 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.

The electors will be informed of 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. 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 Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

Excommunication will end when in the unanimous opinion of the elders the one under discipline has repented. Such repentance and reception will be communicated to the congregation with the elders formally announcing the end of the discipline, restoration to of fellowship, and call for thanksgiving.

Subordinate Ministries

The elders may unanimously delegate to an individual or board the executive authority of any subordinate ministry established by the elders. This executive responsibility continues at the pleasure of the elders. In order to dismiss such an individual, or remove someone from such a board, a two-thirds vote of the elders is required. Separation of a subordinate ministry from Christ Church may be authorized by a unanimous vote of the elders. All formal actions concerning subordinate ministries will be entered in the minutes of the elders' meetings.

Incorporation

As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christ Church is not constituted or incorporated by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, the only head of the church. Christ Church maintains its status as an unincorporated church as a matter of conscience.

Affiliation

Christ Church is a member of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) and accepts all the constitutional requirements that come with this affiliation. Such affiliation may be ended by a unanimous vote of the session in consultation with the electors. The same requirement being needed for entering into any joint or subsequent affiliations.

Amendments

The Christ Church Confession of Faith and Constitution may be amended through unanimous consent of the elders when there is first a presentation of the proposed change at a meeting of electors, a written copy of the proposed change is made available to the congregation and the elders seek due consultation at a meeting of electors.

We confess that this constitution is a fallible work of fallible men and, if obedience to Scripture requires it, may be set aside without the process of amendment by the unanimous judgment of the elders. Under such circumstances, the electors will be informed, and the constitution amended at the first opportunity.

Appendix #1: Book of Confessions

Our statement of faith is comprised of the following documents, all subordinate to the Scriptures, and of which we are in agreement: The Reformed Evangelical Confession which, together with the historic church, we confess the following:

The Apostles' Creed (AD 2nd century)

We believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the virgin, Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended into Hades. On the third day He rose again, ascended into Heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father; from thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Nicene Creed Constantinople (AD 381)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin, Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into Heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, and Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spoke by the Prophets. And we believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church; acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Definition of Chalcedon (AD 451)

Following, then, the holy fathers, we unite in teaching all men to confess the one and same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. This selfsame one is perfect both in deity and in humanity; truly God and truly man, with a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father according to His deity, and consubstantial with us according to the humanity; like us in all respects, sin only excepted. Before the ages He was begotten of the Father, according to the deity, and in these last days, for us and for our salvation, He was born of Mary the virgin, who is Godbearer according to His humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures; without confusing them, without interchanging them, without dividing them, and without separating them; the distinction of natures by no means taken away by the union, but the properties of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one subsistence; not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same only-begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as from the beginning the prophets have declared concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the symbol of the fathers has handed down to us.

A Westminster Creed (A modern selection from the 17th century Shorter Catechism)

We believe man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever; we believe God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth;

We believe there is but one true and living God; that there are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and that these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory;

We believe God has foreordained whatever comes to pass; that God made all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good; and that God preserves and governs all His creatures and all their actions.

We believe our first parents, though created in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, sinned against God, by eating the forbidden fruit; and that their fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery;

We believe God determined, out of His mere good pleasure, to deliver His elect out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer;

We believe the only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continues to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever;

We believe Christ, as our Redeemer, executes the office of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king.

We believe Christ as our Redeemer underwent the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, the cursed death of the cross, and burial; He rose again from the dead on the third day, ascended up into heaven, sits at the right hand of God, the Father, and is coming to judge the world at the last day.

We believe we are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by his Holy Spirit;

We believe God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance unto life to escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin;

We believe by His free grace we are effectually called, justified, and sanctified, and gathered into the visible church, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation;

We believe that we also are given in this life such accompanying benefits as assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end; that at death, we are made perfect in holiness, and immediately pass into glory; and our bodies, being still united in Christ, rest in their graves, till the resurrection; and at the resurrection, we shall be raised up in glory, we shall openly be acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment, and made perfectly blessed in the full enjoying of God to all eternity.

An Evangelical Statement (Adapted from the National Association of Evangelicals)

We believe the Bible to be the only inerrant Word of God. It is our only ultimate and infallible authority for faith and practice.

We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three Persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is omnipotent, that is, He is all-powerful. He is omnipresent, that is, He is present throughout all Creation but not limited by it.

He is omniscient, that is, nothing is hidden from His sight. In all things He is limited by nothing other than His own nature and character.

We believe the God we serve is holy, righteous, good, severe, loving and full of mercy. He created the heavens and earth, and everything in them, in the space of six ordinary days, and all very good. He is the Creator, Sustainer, and Governor of everything that has been made.

We believe in the true deity and full humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father and in His personal return in power and glory.

We believe in the full deity of the Holy Spirit, acknowledging Him together with the Father and the Son in the works of creation and redemption.

We believe that because of Adam's sin all mankind is in rebellion against God. For the salvation of such lost and sinful men, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary.

We believe that salvation is by grace through faith alone, and that faith without works is dead.

We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and lost; those who are saved to the resurrection of life, and those who are lost to the resurrection of damnation. We believe in the spiritual unity of all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Appendix #2: Marriage Definition And Policies

We confess that the church is subject only to Christ. God alone is Lord of the conscience. While church members ought to obey civil rulers in temporal things, provided they are not required by those authorities to sin (Mk. 12:13-17; Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pt. 2:13-17), the church has a divine right to embody her beliefs in her practices and to carry out the mission Christ has entrusted to her without interference or hindrance. The church as an institution shall remain free from state control in faith, doctrine, and practice, and her members should not be forced to act contrary to their consciences, as informed by the Word of God. We gladly render to Caesar what is Caesar's, but under no circumstances will we render to Caesar that which belongs only to God. With these truths in view, we declare the church's right to reject any attempts on the part of the state to impose on the church or her members unbiblical definitions of marriage.

Marriage as a covenant bond between a man and a woman is an institution founded not in cultural convention or convenience, but in God's act of creation (Gen. 2:23-24). Marriage is God's ordinance, a holy mystery instituted for his glory and our good. It is our desire to honor the marriage bed and keep it undefiled (Heb. 13:4). Sex outside of marriage, sex with someone other than one's spouse, divorce without biblical grounds, and the taking of more than one spouse, are all among the many ways in which God's institution of marriage has been dishonored. We believe the union between husband and wife in heart, body, and mind to be a sacred bond, intended by God for their mutual joy and companionship; for the help and comfort given one another in times of prosperity and adversity; and, when it is God's will, for the procreation of children and their nurture in the knowledge and love of the Lord. We believe man and woman to be equal in creation and

redemption, equal in worth and dignity; and yet the sexes are different from one another and thus complementary in their roles in church, society, and family. God has ordained the covenant of marriage so that husband and wife would together symbolize the relationship of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21ff); he has designed loving and faithful marriages to be the best possible context in which children, as the fruit of their parents' mutual love, can be raised to healthy maturity; and he has called husband and wife to help one another in the pursuit of a common salvation and service to the common good of humanity. Because of the nature of the marriage relation, a believer ought to marry in the Lord (1 Cor. 7:39).

We believe the preservation of biblical marriage to be essential to the well-being and health not only of the church but of civil society. Following the Scriptures and the historic Christian tradition, we define marriage as a covenant freely and lawfully entered into by a man and a woman, sealed by sexual relations. This covenant is to be a lifelong commitment until husband and wife are parted by death. The covenant of marriage can be broken by infidelity (Matt. 19:1-10) or desertion (which includes not only abandonment but severe forms of abuse; cf. 1 Cor. 7:10-16). If at all possible, broken marriage covenants should be repaired through repentance and forgiveness, though we recognize there are situations where such full restoration will be impossible or unwise. The session of TPC is responsible to determine for her members if there are biblical grounds for divorce in any given case.

We believe the covenant of marriage between a man and woman to be the only relationship in which God's gift of sex can be lawfully enjoyed (Prov. 5:15-23). Sex with anyone other than one's spouse is contrary to God's design for human flourishing. The covenant bond of marriage protects the precious treasure of sexuality. Misuses of God's beautiful gift of sexuality through fornication, premarital cohabitation, adultery, pornography, attempts to surgically or chemically alter one's gender, transvestism, etc., lead to the dehumanizing of self and the exploitation of others, contrary to the law of love. We are urged in Scripture to make a covenant with our eyes to not look lustfully on another (Job 31:1; Matt. 5:27-30), to abstain from sexual immorality that we may possess our bodies in holiness and honor (1 Thess. 4:1-8), and to not present our members as instruments of sin but to present ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:1-14).

We resist all attempts to redefine marriage to include same sex partnerships. We can never regard a same sex relationship of any kind as a marriage, no matter what civil society might say about it. Homosexual relations are unlawful and contrary to our God-designed natures as men and women (Rom. 1:18-32).

While humanity's fall into sin has disordered our desires, including our sexual desires, God's original design in the creation of man and woman remains normative (Gen. 1-2; Matt. 19:1-10). Certainly, we desire to bless, serve, and love persons with homosexual desires. We know we are fellow image bearers and fellow sinners along with them, and we long to show them the compassion of Christ. But we cannot countenance the fulfillment of their desires under any circumstances. Rather, we call on persons with such desires to join us in trusting the Lord Jesus to forgive our sin through his shed blood and transform us by his healing grace (though we also fully recognize that living as faithful disciples of Jesus is always a struggle and all of us fall short of the goal in this life).

In light of these principles, the session of Christ Church adopts the following policy: Our church building and property are not to be used to host any ceremonies inconsistent with the biblical teaching on marriage, nor is our pastoral staff to be involved with such ceremonies. For example, this means a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever is not to be conducted on TPC grounds. Neither is an unlawfully divorced person with outstanding obligations to their former spouse to be married on our property. Likewise, this policy means any kind of ceremony between a same sex couple is not to be performed on TPC grounds. Further, the session forbids TPC ministers from conducting or participating in any such services. May God help us as we confess and defend the teaching of his Word concerning the institution of marriage.

APPENDIX #3 Conducting Business Via Electronic Means

The Christ Church session and diaconate may conduct business via email, video/conference call and other electronic means, provided there is ample opportunity for communication among all participating members, equivalent to those of meetings held in one room or area. When business is done via email, passed motions should be incorporated into the minutes of the next stated, in-person meeting.