

East River Church

Batavia, Ohio

A Mission Church of the
Communion of Reformed
Evangelical Churches (CREC)

Constitution and By-Laws

OF THE CHURCH

We believe that the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church (Matt. 16:18). We believe in the communion of saints and in the holy catholic (universal) Church. This Church of God purchased with Christ's blood is manifested in diverse particular congregations in all the earth. It is the duty of each Christian in the holy catholic Church to be committed to and connected with a Biblically ordered particular congregation located in their geographical area. East River Church (ERC) has been so constituted by Christ through His duly ordained representatives as a particular congregation. Because we believe that churches are to be connected with one another through representative presbyters (elders) for the purpose of shepherding, oversight, accountability, and discipline, our affiliation is with the Augustine Presbytery of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in our local expression of Christ's Church is constituted by a profession of faith, sealed in baptism. Baptism is the rite of initiation into the covenant of grace and the means of admission to the catholic Church; the one baptized maintains good standing in the Church by walking in faith, by the grace of God.

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

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

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

The elders of ERC are responsible to examine the orthodoxy of all candidates for membership, and to see that their lives do not contradict their professions. The session should make sure that all candidates coming for membership by transfer have been baptized in the Triune name by lawful officer of a bible believing Church. The session may delegate the task of meeting with prospective members to a commission of two elders. Interviews with prospective members should include a discussion of the candidate's Christian experience/life, the content of the membership vows, and ways in which the Church and new member can mutually serve and bless one another.

Membership vows include:

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

Incoming Transfers

If those requesting membership in ERC are presently members of another congregation, the session of ERC will ordinarily send a request of transfer to the leadership of that congregation. If no reply is made in thirty days, the ERC session may proceed with the membership transfer. It is the desire of ERC to respect the governmental actions of other churches as much as possible. No one baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to be rebaptized. However, we are a credo-communion only congregation and therefore will ask that all prospective members consider this prior to transferring membership. We will make every attempt to honor and acknowledge the work of other sessions insofar it doesn't bind the conscience of our own session and threaten the unity of our congregation. If the prospective member

has been under discipline in another congregation, a full investigation is to be made and the session issue a ruling.

Records of Membership

The session of ERC is to keep careful records of membership, including baptisms and communicant members, for the purpose of providing loving oversight of the congregation. The session should always keep the congregation informed of changes in Church membership, at the very least by keeping accurate and accessible records.

Release or Transfer of Membership

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

If members move from our geographic area, they are charged to find a new Church home within six months. This time may be reduced or extended at the session's discretion. After this time is expired, they are released from membership and pastoral oversight, though they should be encouraged to properly transfer to a new body as soon as possible.

Members of this Church who willfully, without plausible reason or excuse, consistently or habitually absent themselves from Lord's Day worship shall be subject to Church discipline, as the session deems appropriate, for the purity of the Church and the Spiritual health of the absent member. This time may be shortened or extended as the session deems fit. If it is not possible to pursue a full course of church discipline, the absentee member may be erased from membership with censure, which may be regarded as a functional excommunication, as the session deems appropriate. Such erasures are viewed as disciplinary cases without process. If a member begins attending another Church without transferring membership over an extended period of time, longer than twelve months, he may have his name erased from the membership roll of ERC without discipline.

Communicant Membership

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for overseeing the administration of the Sacraments remains with the elders. Sacraments belong to the Church and not to families. All baptized members, including children, are admitted to the table by elders on the basis of a credible profession of faith. The credibility of their faith is to be

determined through an elder interview involving at least two session members. Parents are welcomed to sit in on the interview. There is no age requirement to be admitted to the table. All baptized children are subject to the nurture and discipline of the Church, along with their parents.

Voting Members and Elections

Voting members (i.e. electors) are communing members of the Church, customarily age sixteen and above. The session may revoke voting privileges as part of the disciplinary process. Voting will take place by electors in the election of Church offices and orders, including elders and deacons; if necessary, the dismissal of those same officers; the amending of the Constitution; leaving the CREC and making a new ecclesiastical affiliation; and other times the session may deem wise or necessary, such as major property transactions. The session must provide two weeks' notice before all voting. **Votes should ordinarily be held in conjunction with a Lord's Day service to maximize attendance. At least half of the congregation's voting membership must be present as a quorum for a vote. A passing vote requires the affirmation of two-thirds of those voting.**

LEADERSHIP

Session Leadership

Christ is the head of the Church (Eph. 5:23) and according to His Word, the form of local congregational government is a plurality of qualified men exercising leadership in the local congregation of believers (1 Pet. 5:1; Phil. 1:1). The office designated for ruling and shepherding the church is the office of elder or presbyter, some of whom are called as pastors (1 Tim. 5:17; Tit. 1:5-9). Therefore, under Christ, the ordained authority within the local church is the presbyters, pastors or elders in Session. (For a description of the Presbytery's authority over the local church, see the Constitution of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.)

The elders and pastors are collectively responsible for leading and shepherding (1 Pet. 5:1-2); equipping (Eph. 4:11-12); praying and fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3); preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17); leading and ordering worship (1 Tim. 4:13; 1 Cor. 14:40); administering the sacraments (Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-26, 40); administering church discipline and restoration (1 Cor. 5:1-5), and prayer for the healing of the sick (Jas. 5:14-15).

The Session is also authorized to delegate responsibilities to the deacons, hire and fire church staff, define responsibilities for church staff, delegate responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries, and review the annual budget for Consistory approval. The Session may also commission or license ministerial students, and oversee the course of their training. Under the Session's guidance and oversight, such men may perform

all the various ministerial functions of pastors and elders.

Offices

Jesus Christ has appointed two offices for the edification and growth of His Church. The extraordinary offices of apostle and prophet have now ceased, as their revelatory, foundation-laying roles in redemptive history are complete (Eph. 2:20). ERC's form of government includes and makes provision for the following ordinary and perpetual offices: elders and deacon. Scripture makes a functional distinction within the office of elder: teaching elders and ruling elders. Pastor or teaching elder is an office of Word and Sacrament. Ruling elder is an office of service and rule. These titles do not indicate different grades of office, but all describe one and the same office. Elders being of one class of office, ruling elders possess the same authority and eligibility to office in the courts of the Church as teaching elders. They should, moreover, cultivate zealously their own aptness to teach the Bible and should improve every opportunity of doing so.

It especially belongs to the teaching elder,

To pray for and with his flock, as the mouth of the people unto God; to pray publicly for the people, especially in gathered worship; to pray privately for and with the people, especially for the sick; and to pray for the lost;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To encourage husbands and fathers to be faithful in loving their wives as Christ loves the Church and in raising their children in the fear and admonition of the

Lord; to encourage wives and mothers to be diligent and faithful by caring for their families with joy and contentment; to encourage singles to pursue purity and service in accord with their vocations; and to encourage children to grow towards maturity in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ;

To take care of the poor, in conjunction with the other officers;
To pray for and anoint the sick with oil in the name of the Lord, when called upon;

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

To authorize and deputize a ruling elder or deacon to administer the Lord's Supper in his absence;

To lead the session as moderator and overseer;

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

To serve as bishop, or superintendent, over a collection of local Churches, or moderator of presbytery, if so called.

It especially belongs to the office of ruling elder,

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

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

To oversee the doctrine and practice of the flock;
To set an example of godliness in all things;
To act as peacekeepers and judges in cases of dispute;

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

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

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

To assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper and the collection of tithes and offerings; To execute Church discipline when and as situations require it;

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

Ruling elders labor beside pastors in lovingly shepherding and discipling the people. In times of necessity or in the absence of an officer ordained to administer the Sacraments, the pastor or presbytery or moderator of presbytery may appoint a ruling elder to administer.

Deacon is an office of service and stewardship, under the oversight of the session. Deacons are men who assist the elders, with a special calling to minister mercy, primarily among the family of God, and secondarily in the world, as well as performing other assorted tasks (Acts 6:3-4). The session may create additional non-authoritative orders of men and women within the congregation to provide service and give assistance to the officers.

Primarily, it belongs to the office of deacon,

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

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

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

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

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

To assist in the distribution of the Lord's Supper and the collection of tithes and offerings; To assist in the Church's liturgical feasts and fellowship meals;

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

To care for and maintain the property of the Church.

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

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

Duties of Deacons

Under the general oversight of the elders, the deacons manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church (Acts 6:2-4). Such responsibilities include building maintenance, fellowship meals, subordinate ministries as needed, and benevolence.

The business of the deacons will be conducted at monthly diaconal meetings and with at joint-meeting with session at least once a year. Accurate minutes of such meetings will be kept and the deacons will give regular reports relating to finances and ministry to the Session.

Regular Meetings of Church Officers

Elder business will be conducted in Session. The Session is the regular, called meeting of the (active serving) elders and pastors in which they act corporately to rule in the church of God (1 Tim. 5:17). The Session will record accurate minutes of the actions taken in their meetings. In all meetings of the Session each elder or pastor has one vote.

Election of Elders and Deacons

The Session (of elders and pastors) will examine any potential candidate for elder or deacon with regard to his doctrine and manner of life. If he has any disagreement or reservation about any portion of the church's doctrinal views as expressed in the Westminster Confession, Shorter Catechism, Larger Catechism, or this Constitution, then he must inform the Session of it. All candidates must meet the qualifications for the office set down in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:2-4; 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Nominations may be received from any elector or officer at any time, provided that they have asked the individual if they desire to pursue the office at this time and that the nomination is delivered to the pastor or moderator of the Session in writing. Willing, nominated individuals that are approved with unanimous consent of the Session will normally undergo some training, instruction, and examination. During this time, the congregation will be encouraged to address any concerns of the fitness of the nominee for office to the Session. The Session, after considerations arise in the time of training, instruction, and examination, may approve the nominee, or not, as a formal candidate for election by unanimous consent.

After candidates are approved for election, the voting ballot will provide the option of voting "yes," "no," or "abstain." If the candidate receives at least a three-quarters majority approval from all ballots cast in the election, the pastor(s) and elders will ordain him through laying on hands and prayer. Ordination of an elder or deacon is for life, unless he resigns or is removed. Leaves of absence and requested sabbaticals from service in the offices of ruling elder or deacon may be granted by the Session. Such

sabbaticals are ordinarily to be granted on a one-year term. Officers on sabbatical are in the status of inactive service, though still considered in office. Inactive officers may be asked to serve or give counsel, but they have no vote on the Session or Presbytery. Active service normally consists of a five-year term after which a one-year sabbatical is recommended. After an officer goes on sabbatical, whether scheduled or voluntary, the officer may voluntarily return to active service or resign from office. The implementation and termination of such sabbaticals is at the discretion of the Session. A pastor is eligible for a sabbatical after seven years of service. Such a pastoral sabbatical may be taken for one month per seven years of service (in addition to ordinary vacation) and is to be scheduled at the discretion of the Session. It is recommended that the Minister use this sabbatical for self-improvement.

Calling and Ordination of Pastors

Pastors and Associate Pastors called to minister to East River Church must be unanimously called by the Session and a 3/4's vote of the electors. Any pastor called to labor in the congregation must also be subject to follow the ordination and examination procedures of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. The terms of any pastoral call, including compensation, vacation time, ministerial expenses, etc., shall be determined by Session and reviewed annually.

Dismissal and Termination of a Pastoral Call

While East River Church encourages her pastor(s) toward a long-term view of the ministry in the providence of God, changes in a pastor's call to a particular church arise for both righteous and sinful reasons. In cases involving moral failures requiring disciplinary proceedings, the disciplinary process for the removal of a Pastor or Associate Pastor from office follows that which is discussed below for other elders. Changes in the calling of a Pastor or Associate Pastor so as to be dismissed from service at East River Church for reasons other than for disciplinary action (below) are as follows: a) When a Pastor or Associate Pastor desires to terminate his tenure in office, he shall duly inform Session of his desire. b) In the case of the involuntary termination of a pastoral call, a pastor may be recommended for dismissal from service at East River Church by a unanimous vote of the Session (excluding said pastor). In such a case, a Pastor or Associate Pastor may call for a vote of the electors to sustain his call or not. If the electors sustain his call by a 3/4's vote, Session may either concede to the congregation and withdraw recommendation to terminate the pastor's call or refer the matter to presbytery for binding arbitration.

Resignation of Elders or Deacons

If an elder or deacon desires to resign or take a leave of absence, he must do so in writing to the Session. The Session will notify the church at a congregational meeting. If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal irregularity, then the resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate Biblical discipline.

Removal of Pastors, Elders or Deacons

If two or three witnesses believe an elder or deacon to be morally or doctrinally unfit for office, then they will present charges to the elders (1 Tim. 5:19). If the elders (excluding the accused, in such a case) unanimously decides that the question merits an investigation and/or hearing, at their discretion they may inform the voting members of the charges, announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or hearing, and encourage the members to attend. If the charges are unanimously sustained by the other elders, then the accused elder or deacon, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction, may be rebuked at the congregational meeting (1 Tim. 5:20), or may be removed from the office of elder or deacon (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), or both.

Church Discipline

The ordinary course of discipline is informal. Members are encouraged in 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. The pattern of church discipline will include formal private admonition by two or three (Matt. 18:16), then formal public admonition in a congregational meeting, then suspension from the Lord's Table (2 Thess. 3:14-15), and then a formal hearing which may result in excommunication. Based on the nature of the discipline case, Session may conduct the hearing privately or publicly. In every case the accused may present evidence and witnesses.

Any communicant member of a member household may be disciplined by the church. Un-baptized members of member households are subject to pastoral admonishment from the church, but not excommunication since they are not communicant members. Non-member communicant Christians who attend church regularly are subject to pastoral admonition, but not to formal excommunication. Nevertheless, a non-member who is divisive, heretical, scandalous, or factious may be barred from the Lord's Table and rejected after proper admonition (1 Tim. 3:10). If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to East River Church, then the Session will honor the discipline of the other church, unless after due consultation with the person concerned and after all appropriate information is considered, the Session unanimously rejects such disciplinary actions as out of accord with the government of Christ.

Excommunication will end when the elders unanimously affirms that the one under discipline has repented. A confession of this repentance will be presented to the congregation on the Lord's Day, and the elders shall formally announce the restoration.

Appeals

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

Excommunicants, while technically no longer church members, may appeal the decision of the Session to Presbytery, and to Council, if they desire.

All parties should agree to abide by decisions rendered by broader courts of the church, even as we acknowledge that such courts are fallible and perfect justice will not be administered until the Lord does so at the final judgment.

Appeals should be made in a timely fashion (normally within 30 days of the verdict being appealed) and the Session should be notified in writing, along with the Presbytery or other relevant courts.

WORSHIP

LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS

The Public Worship Service

Worship services shall be held as often as the Session may determine, but the regular schedule of meetings shall always include the Lord's Day service. The Bible teaches that the following are proper elements of worship service: reading of Holy Scripture, singing of psalms and hymns, the offering of prayer, the preaching of the Word, the presentation of offerings, confessing the faith and observing the Sacraments; and on special occasions taking oaths.

The session may also schedule other times of worship (including the Lord's Supper), especially in accord with the historic Christian calendar. While only Lord's Day services are considered "mandatory," members are strongly encouraged to participate in these other worship events, unless providentially hindered. Members are also encouraged to participate in other educational programs, outreach/evangelistic efforts, mission and mercy works, and social events in the life of the Church, as ways of fulfilling their membership vows.

The Nature of Baptism

Baptism is a blessed sacrament of the New Testament instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of salvation. The sacramental washing with water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit officially admits a person into the visible church, testifies of their identification with the Triune God of Scripture, union with Christ, regeneration, forgiveness of sin, consecration to walk in newness of life, and fellowship in the Body of Christ (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 2:11,12; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-5; Tit. 3:5; Mark 1:4; Matt. 28:19, 20). Baptism is ordinarily to be performed in the context of a Lord's Day worship service by the pastor.

Recipients of Baptism

Baptism, as has been nearly universally held in the Church, is appropriately administered to the children of Christians in infancy, since to them, no less than to adults are the promises of participation in the covenant, church, and kingdom of our Savior. And to them no less than to adults do the benefits of Christ and His redemption accomplished apply (Acts 2:39; Matt. 18:15-17; Eph. 6:4). That which is signified and conferred in baptism, therefore, is applicable to infants promised to be in covenant, as well as to adults who profess salvation.

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

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

To the parents:

1. Do you bring this child for baptism in faith, trusting in God's covenant promises that He will be your child's God (Gen. 17:7) and Savior from sin (Acts 16:31; 1 Pt. 3:21), persuaded that God desires to receive your child into his family and flock (Mt. 18:1-14), and speaking on his behalf as his representative and sponsor (Mt. 15:22)?
2. Do you bring this child for baptism in faith, trusting God to unite him to Christ in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-14); to clothe him with Christ (Gal. 3:27);

to make him a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13); and to make this baptism his entrance into the new creation in Christ Jesus (Tit. 3:5)?

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

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

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

To the congregation:

Do you, the congregation of East River Church, promise to undertake the responsibility of assisting these parents as they nurture this child in Christian faith and practice to the glory of God?

The time having come for the making of a public profession, and those who have been approved by the Session having taken their places in the presence of the congregation, the minister may state that:

Of the number of those who were baptized in infancy as members of the Church of God by birthright, and as heirs of the covenant promises, the Session has examined and approved (call them by name), who come now to assume for themselves the full privileges and responsibilities of their inheritance in the household of faith.

If there be present any candidates for Baptism, the minister may state that:

As applicants for admission into the Church of God by Baptism, which is a sign and seal of our engrafting into Christ, and of our engagement to be the

Lord's, the Session has examined and approved (call them by name), who are cordially welcomed into the fellowship of the household of faith.

The minister may then address those making a profession in the following terms:

(All of) you being here present to make a public profession of faith, are to assent to the following declarations and promises, by which you enter into a solemn covenant with God and His Church.

- 1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His displeasure, and without hope save in His sovereign mercy?**
- 2. Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?**
- 3. Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes the followers of Christ?**
- 4. Do you promise to support the Church in its worship and work to the best of your ability?**
- 5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?**

The minister may now briefly admonish those making a profession of faith as to the importance of the solemn obligations they have assumed; then baptism may be administered, if there be present any candidates for the ordinance, and the whole concluded with prayer.

The Lord's Supper, or Communion

Communion, or Supper of the Lord, is to be observed frequently; the stated times to be determined by the Session of each congregation, as it may judge most for edification. The ignorant and scandalous are not to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. It is proper that public notice should be given to the congregation, at least the Sabbath before the administration of this ordinance, and that, either then, or on some day of the week, the people be instructed in its nature, and a due preparation for it, that all may come in a suitable manner to this holy feast.

The table, on which the elements are placed, being decently covered, and furnished with bread and wine, and the communicants orderly and gravely sitting around it (or in their seats before it), the elders in a convenient place together, the minister should then set the elements apart by prayer and thanksgiving.

The bread and wine being thus set apart by prayer and thanksgiving, the elements are to be distributed to the people. Then the minister is to take the bread, and break it, in the view of the people, saying:

The Lord Jesus Christ on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, gave it to His disciples, as I, ministering in His name, give this bread to you, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (Some other biblical account of the institution of this part of the Supper may be substituted here.)

After having taken the bread, he shall take the cup, and say:

In the same manner, He also took the cup, and having given thanks as has been done in His name, He gave it to the disciples, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Drink from it, all of you."

While the minister is repeating these words, let him drink the cup.

Since believers are to act personally in all their covenanting with the Lord, it is proper that a part of the time occupied in the distribution of the elements should be spent by all in silent communion, thanksgiving, intercession and prayer.

The minister may, in a few words, put the communicants in mind: Of the grace of God, in Jesus Christ, held forth in this sacrament; and of their obligation to be the Lord's; and may exhort them to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called; and, as they have professedly received Christ Jesus the Lord, that they be careful so to walk in him, and to maintain good works.

It may not be improper for the minister to give a word of exhortation also to those who have been only spectators, reminding them of their duty, stating their sin and danger, by living in disobedience to Christ, in neglecting this holy ordinance; and calling upon them to be earnest in making preparation for attending upon it at the next time of its celebration.

Then the minister is to pray and give thanks to God for His rich mercy, and invaluable goodness, vouchsafed to them in that Sacred Communion; to implore pardon for the defects of the whole service; and to pray for the acceptance of their persons and performances; for the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit to enable them, as they have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so to walk in Him; that they may hold fast that which they have received, that no man take their crown; that their conversation may be as becomes the Gospel; that they may bear about with them, continually, the dying of

the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in their mortal body; that their light may so shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father who is in heaven.

An offering for the poor or other sacred purpose is appropriate in connection with this service, and may be made at such time as shall be ordered by the Session. Now let a psalm or hymn be sung, and the congregation dismissed, with the following or some other Gospel benediction.

Recipients of the Communion

ERC practices a discriminating form of “open communion.” That is, we encourage all baptized Christians (in good standing, not excommunicated) to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and so commune with Christ in His body. Visiting Christians should abide by the policies of ERC with regard to participation.

Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the Sacraments remains with the session. Baptized children are welcome to partake as soon as they have been interviewed and admitted by the session of a bible believing church. However, for those who differ with this view, the session will attempt to accommodate them insofar it does not contradict our explicitly stated positions as a credo-communion congregation.

While the Lord’s Supper is ordinarily to be administered in the context of the whole local body on the Lord’s Day, the pastor and/or session may designate other times of celebration as well. The Lord’s Supper may also be administered by the pastor to the sick and to invalids, who are unable to attend the congregation’s regular assemblies, even if only two or three are present.

DISSOLUTION

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

REVISING AND AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

We recognize that while God has given to His Church through His Word a plan of government, that form does not cover all necessary details. Thus, many aspects of this Constitution do not presume to be biblically mandated, but only consistent with biblical principles, guided by sanctified common sense and a desire to do all things prudently, decently, and in order. Thus, we recognize the limitations of this Constitution and its subordination to the higher standard of Scripture. We also recognize that the practice

of Christian faithfulness and charity is the best way to compensate for constitutional and procedural deficiencies. The character of office-holders is vastly more important to the health of the Church than the details of the form of government.

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

The session may supplement or clarify the meaning of the Constitution with appendices whenever needed. The session may make any semantic or grammatical modifications at any time provided they are noted in the minutes. The appendices do not have constitutional authority but aid in the interpretation and application of the constitution; in working out constitutionally derived policies to govern the life of the congregation; and in expressing the voice of the session on particular issues.