

CHURCH CONSTITUTION



Amended July 24, 2018

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preamble	
1. Confession	
2. Membership	
3. Governance	
4. Elders	
5. Deacons	
6. Officer Selection	
7. Lord's Service	
8. Sacraments	
9. Discipline	
10. Subordinate Ministries	
11. Incorporation	
12. Amendments	
Appendix A - Book of Confessions	
Appendix B - Book of Church Order	

Preamble

In the church of God all things are to be done decently and in order. This pertains to the government of the church as much as to the corporate worship of the church. Convinced that Jesus Christ, the Head of the church, will protect and guide us, we seek to obey Scripture through the following standards for the orderly and scriptural government of our church, Christ Church Missoula (CCM) of Missoula, Montana. This Constitution does not supplant Scripture, but rather is an expression of our understanding of biblical church government under God. While seeking to be biblical in structure, we make no claim that every detail found here is expressly taught by Scripture.

1. Confession

The Word of God, contained in the 66 books of the Protestant Bible, is our only infallible rule of faith and life. As we believe that Scripture is the ultimate standard, we must avoid any position that impedes the diligent study of the Word or in applying the Word to our own day. Yet, in Scripture, there is abundant proof attesting to the value of the use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms to properly instruct the body of Christ in good and sound doctrine. Details of these additional documents are available in the CCM Book of Confessions.

2. Membership

Membership is reckoned by household and each household shall be represented by the head of household. A head of household is the husband/father of a family, an independently-living adult, or a wife/mother who is responsible for her family. A household is eligible for membership when the head of that household has been lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19), does not contradict his profession through his manner of life (Matt 7:22-23) and attends CCM regularly (Heb 10:25). To become a member, an eligible head of household shall meet with at least two elders to confirm his eligibility and willingness to take the membership vows. Membership vows are detailed in the CCM Book of Church Order.

Membership begins when the covenant membership vows have been taken (Philemon 2; Heb 13:7,17). Children of members do not take separate vows but are considered members upon their baptism. When the head of household represents more than himself, he will also be asked if he speaks on behalf of his household. All members of the household are encouraged to participate in taking membership vows. Upon membership vows being taken, each head of household becomes an elector and is allowed to participate in head of household meetings and elections. The Session oversees a membership list, which must include names, baptisms, and communicant status.

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

3. Governance

Christ Church Missoula is united to the body of Christ by one Spirit, one Lord, one God, one faith, and one baptism (Eph 4:4-6). We acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church (Eph 5:23). In our governance, we are a member of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) and governed locally by elders.

For their mutual encouragement, to preserve unity, and for the wisdom gained from an abundance of counselors, the elders gather together on a regular basis in a formal meeting. When together in this meeting, the elders are called the ‘Session’. A quorum two-thirds of elders is required to convene the Session.

Certain decisions of CCM are reserved to the Session as represented in a formal meeting and include:

- Constitution, Book of Confessions, and Book of Church Order changes
- Formal discipline of members
- Church officer changes
- Membership changes
- Budget approval
- Church staff changes
- Liturgy changes (as defined by the Book of Church Order)
- Church vision approval and review

The Session shall meet no less than once every month to discuss CCM business but can meet more often to better manage the affairs of the church.

Leadership of the Session falls to the Chairman of the Session, who is appointed by two-thirds vote of the elders in a called meeting. The Chairman should be uniquely gifted in administration and leadership and will be appointed by the Session for a term determined by the Session (normally one year, which can be renewed). The Session will also appoint a secretary to record minutes.

The Chairman is accountable for the efficient management of Session business. As such, he is responsible for the following duties:

- Session Meeting
- Session Agenda
- Session Administration

In all meetings of the Session, each elder has one vote and only ‘active’ elders (i.e. elders who are currently serving) may vote. All Session decisions will require a two-thirds majority vote (except church officer changes, formal discipline, CCM Constitution and CCM Book of Confession changes – all of which require a unanimous vote). The Session will handle all disagreements with charity and a spirit of unity, not airing their differences publically as this disturbs the peace of the church. Any Session member under discipline will be excluded from voting on matters directly related to the disciplinary issue but may speak in his own defense.

4. Elders

The elders are collectively responsible for ruling / shepherding (1 Pet 5:1-2); equipping (Eph 4:11-12); prayer and fasting (Acts 6:4; 13:1-3); teaching and 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).

Elders also oversee church administration, including delegating responsibilities to the deacons; hiring and firing church staff; defining the responsibilities of church staff; delegating responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries; approving the annual budget; and commissioning or licensing ministerial students.

All elders shall be men, members of CCM, and shall meet the qualifications as identified in Article 6 and as prescribed in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Elders will serve willingly, with humility and sober-mindedness. All elders should walk in good works (Eph 2:10), following the example of the Lord by showing no partiality, executing justice for the fatherless and widow, and loving the sojourner and stranger (Deut 10:17-18). All elders share the same rank and authority without distinction and are equally involved in ruling the church.

We acknowledge the variety of gifts provided by the Holy Spirit to bless and facilitate the right functioning of the church. As such, we recognize the blessing of having at least one elder dedicated to teaching and preaching (1 Tim 5:17-18), whom we call a pastor.

An elder, from another CRE church, may temporarily serve on the CCM Session assuming he meets all other qualifications for elder. Such an elder's duties, length of service, and authority will be determined by joint agreement with his home session and the CCM Session.

All faithful elders should be honored for their service, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching and so are worthy of a double honor (1 Tim 5:17-18). Elders whose assigned duties preclude them from providing for their families in the ordinary way will be compensated by the church.

Additional guidance on the duties and vows of elders are described in the CCM Book of Church Order.

5. Deacons

All deacons shall be men, members of CCM, and shall meet the qualifications as identified in Article 6 and as prescribed in 1 Tim 3:8-13. Deacons will serve willingly, with humility and sober-mindedness. All deacons should walk in good works (Eph 2:10), following the example of the Lord by showing no partiality, executing justice for the fatherless and widow, and loving the sojourner and stranger (Deut 10:17-18).

The deacons will serve under the authority of the Session. The leadership of the deacons falls to the Chairman of the Deacons, who is appointed by unanimous vote of his fellow deacons.

The deacons are responsible to manage the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church. Deacons will have unique abilities in service, hospitality, care for the needy, and administration. Their regular duties include:

- Managing the church property
- Collecting and distributing the church finances
- Serving the poor and needy

The Chairman of the Deacons will provide quarterly reports to the Session on their efforts.

Additional guidance on the duties and vows of deacons is described in the CCM Book of Church Order.

6. Officer Selection and Removal

A man may be nominated for the office of elder or deacon by his own request (1 Tim 3:1), by church officers, or by other members of the church. Additionally, the Session may request nominations from the church from time to time.

Nominees will be advised that they are being considered for church office and provided the opportunity to consider their interest (1 Tim 3:1) and suitability to serve. Each nominee must meet the qualifications for the office contained in Scripture, support the vision and ministry of CCM, and be willing to faithfully serve the CCM congregation.

If a nominee desires to continue in the nomination process, he must notify the elders of his intent and if he has any disagreement or mental reservation about any portion of CCM's Confession of Faith, Constitution, or Book of Church Order. The Session will determine if those disagreements/reservations prevent the candidate from serving as an officer.

The Session will consider each nominee for church office with regard to his doctrine and manner of life. All officer nominees (both elders and deacons) must be approved for candidacy by unanimous consent of the Session. An elder candidate, who desires to serve as a pastor, shall be examined in the same way as all other elder candidates, with attention given to their gifting and dedication to teaching and preaching. Candidates for deacon will serve among the deacons for a trial period (1 Tim 3:10).

If unanimously approved by the Session, the nominee will be classified as an elder or deacon candidate and the heads of household will be notified. An elder candidate who desires to serve as a pastor will be recognized as such to the heads of household.

After the Session has had sufficient time to examine the candidate's fitness for office, a vote will be held by the Session. If the Session unanimously agrees the candidate has demonstrated his fitness for office, he may be presented for church election.

In church elections, voting is conducted on a per-household basis, with each household casting one vote. Households eligible to vote are those in which the head of that household is a member in good standing. The elders must present candidates and distribute ballots to households at least three weeks prior to an election. Electors can indicate 'Yes', 'No', or 'Abstain' for each candidate. The Session will collect the ballots and review all responses.

If, after carefully weighing the electors input, including meeting as necessary with electors casting “No” votes, the Session unanimously determines that the candidate has the clear and obvious support of the church (Phil 2:1-4), then the officer will be ordained through the laying on of hands, prayer, and the taking of a public vow as prescribed by the Book of Church Order. He will then be presented to the church as an officer of CCM. The local CREC presbytery will be notified of all officer changes at the next presbytery meeting.

If a pastor candidate is approved by the Session, the Session will extend a provisional call for him to be a pastor. His call to be a pastor is finalized only after he is duly approved by the CREC. Following CREC approval, he may be ordained (if necessary) and installed as Pastor.

Officers should, on occasion, take a sabbatical from their duties (Gen 2:2-3; Lev 25:1-4; 1 Chron 24; Luke 1:8). If an officer desires such, he will present a letter to the Session indicating the intended sabbatical length and his proposed return date. Officers on sabbatical do not vote in Session and do not count toward the number required for a quorum. Upon approval of the officer’s sabbatical request, the Session will notify the heads of household.

Officers may voluntarily resign from their position. If an officer desires to resign, he will present a letter to and meet with the Session. If, after such meeting, the officer remains unchanged in his desire, the Session will notify the heads of household and the presbytery. Resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate biblical discipline (under Article 9) nor will sabbaticals be granted as a form of discipline.

Officers may be involuntarily removed from their position if they do not meet the scriptural qualifications for their position or if they undermine the vision and ministry of Christ Church Missoula by causing division and sowing discord (1 Cor 1:10-13; Romans 16:17; 2 Tim 2:14; 1 Tim 1:3-4; Pro 20:3). Involuntary removal requires the unanimous consent of the elders (less the officer under consideration). The Session shall establish the specific procedures for judging the removal of the officer on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. The officer may appeal his removal to the presbytery, but the Session is not bound by its decision. See the CCM Book of Church Order for more details.

7. Lord’s Service

The Lord's Day service is understood to be a service of renewing the covenantal relationship between God and His people. The order of our worship follows the biblical pattern of Call, Confession, Consecration, Communion, and Commission (Lev 1:1-9; 9:8-24; Heb 12:28-29).

Worship services shall regularly be held on the Lord’s Day (Sunday). Additional services can be held by approval of the Session. Since the Lord's Supper is our covenantal meal, we celebrate the Supper at every Lord's Day Service, enjoining all baptized members of the covenant to come to the Lord's Table.

8. Sacraments

Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, instituted by God, to represent Christ to His people, to confirm our interest in Him and to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world.

In particular, the two sacraments of the New Covenant, as established by Christ our Lord in the Gospel, are Baptism and the Lord's Supper (also called Communion). These sacraments are to be dispensed by active officers of the church.

Baptism

Baptism is a sacrament of the New Covenant instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of salvation. Water baptism 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, Mark 1:5, 1 Cor 12:13, Col 2:11-12, Gal 3:27, Rom 6:3-5, Titus 3:5).

Following the Old Covenant pattern of the sacrament of circumcision (Gen. 17, 21), baptism is offered to those professing faith in Christ (Rom. 4:11) and their children (Acts 2:38-39, 1 Cor 7:14, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15), recognizing that all believers are called to honor their baptism by continuing to cling to Christ in faith throughout their lives.

Lord's Supper

Lord's Supper (or Communion) is a blessed sacrament of the New Testament instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of His redemptive work. By eating the bread and drinking the cup, believers spiritually feed upon Christ, renew their union and communion with Him, acknowledge His redemptive work on their behalf, renew their thankfulness for His saving work, and spiritually commune with other believers (Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor 10:14-21; 11:23-26).

The sacrament of Communion shall be offered during the usual Lord's Day service when the believers are gathered together (1 Cor 11:20-34). Following the Old Covenant pattern of the sacrament of the Passover (Exodus 12:3-11), we encourage all baptized Christians to come to the Lord's Supper and so commune with Christ and His body (Math 19:14). This includes all baptized young children being raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph 6:4). All attendees are warned not to come to the Lord's Supper if they have anything against their brother, or are under church discipline, until they are reconciled (Math 5:23-24).

9. 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).

If informal discipline is not sufficient to correct a member, formal discipline by the Session will be used. Except in cases of scandal requiring immediate attention, formal church

discipline will be initiated by a private admonishment by two or three (Matt 18:16), followed by a public admonishment and then suspension from the Supper (2 Thess 3:14-15). Finally, a formal hearing will be conducted which may result in excommunication (Matt 18:17). At any point, the formal discipline may be ended when, in the unanimous opinion of the elders, the one under discipline has repented.

If formal discipline is required, 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. See the CCM Book of Church Order for more details.

If one of the members believes an officer may be unfit for his office, the discipline process detailed above will be followed, with the additional requirement that no charges against an elder will even be considered without two or three witnesses (1 Tim 5:19).

In the event of excommunication, the individual will be formally declared separated from the body of Christ and not allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper (Math 18:17, 1 Cor 5:11-13). The individual should be considered as a lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7) and encouraged to repent and return to the body of Christ (2 Cor 2:5-8).

Excommunication will end when, in the unanimous opinion of the elders, the one under discipline has repented. Confession of this repentance will be read to the congregation on the Lord's Day, and the elders shall formally announce the end of the discipline and restoration of fellowship with much rejoicing (1 Cor 2:5-11).

10. Subordinate Ministries

The elders may 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.

If the individual concerned is also an elder, he is excluded from voting on any matters concerning his own case. If separation of a subordinate ministry from CCM becomes necessary, that action may be authorized by a unanimous vote of the elders.

11. Incorporation

Christ Church Missoula ("CCM") is currently constituted as a non-profit religious corporation under Montana state law. We understand that a day may come when the civil magistrate may impose such restrictions upon us that may require us to renounce such status – especially if they prevent us from preaching the counsel of God or require us to act contrary to the Scriptures.

12. Amendments

The CCM Constitution may be amended by the Session. Changes to the CCM Constitution and the Book of Confessions require a unanimous vote by the Session. Changes to the CCM Book of Church Order require a two-thirds vote of the Session. Heads of household shall be notified of any planned changes to the CCM Constitution, Book of Confessions, or Book of Church Order and their input requested.

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