

The Constitution of All Saints Church

A Reformational and Covenantal Congregation

A Congregation in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC),

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

March 10, 2020

Our vision is to grow in love and to reach out in love because we worship the loving God of the Bible - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We gather to renew our relationship with Him and one another in the Biblical pattern of historic Christian liturgy. In this we affirm God's promises to us and our children and are commissioned to live Christ-centered lives in the world.

PREAMBLE

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 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. All Saints Church 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. The order of our worship follows the biblical pattern of call, confession, consecration through the Word, communion, and a commission to go forth and serve."

MEMBERSHIP

Household Membership

In All Saints Church, membership is normally reckoned by household. A household may be eligible for membership when the head of that household, ordinarily the husband and/or father, has been lawfully baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19) and does not contradict his profession through his manner of life (Matt. 7:22-23). Membership begins when covenant membership vows have been taken (Philemon 2; Heb. 13:7,17), or when the Session receives a member by transfer. The received member will take public membership vows. The Session (of elders and pastors) maintains records of the membership of the congregation, including baptismal records. As circumstances warrant, individuals from non-member households may join the church. Independent unmarried members are considered a household for purposes of voting. Individuals may also come under our pastoral care without coming into formal membership or voting membership as denoted by an action of the Session. As children of member households transition to adulthood, the Session will inquire about each person's membership commitment and apply the policies of membership (below) to each young adult in an annual review of the status of member households. This determination will take into consideration factors such as church attendance, financial independence, spiritual maturity and marital status. The result of this review will be to continue to consider them as

members of the household, release them from our care, or reckon them as individual members.

Release or Transfer of Membership

If any member requests to be released to the care of another Christian church, the Session will release him with a blessing, except as noted below. If members cease regular attendance in order to seek a new church home, or relocate from our geographical area, they are charged to transfer their membership. If no request of membership transfer is made within six months of a member's regular worship attendance, they will be dismissed from membership at the Session's discretion. Members of this church who shall willfully, consistently absent themselves from Lord's Day worship may be subject to the steps of church discipline or be dishonorably erased from membership in the Church at the discretion of the Session.

Electors

Those members who vote in church elections are called electors. Electors are the heads of member households (whether men or women) and those granted voting capacity by the Session. Moreover, electors also are recognized and heard at a regular heads of households meeting (usually monthly). New business brought to the attention of the Consistory of elders and deacons by the electors will be appropriately considered. All church-related concerns and complaints should first be addressed to the relevant person(s) in private, if possible (Matt. 18:15), and if necessary brought to the attention of the Session. For concerns that are grave in nature, an elector should present the concerns in writing to an active member of the Session.

At least three weeks prior to any church election, a ballot will be provided. Voting will take place by electors in the a) elections of elders and deacons, b) the calling or dismissal of pastors, c) the amending of this Constitution and our Book of Confessions, and d) whenever the Session may determine that a vote is necessary. In such cases, the Session will specify the action for the vote and the necessary quantity of the vote to be binding on the Session or Consistory's decision(s).

LEADERSHIP

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 Book of Confessions, 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 it is delivered to the pastor or chairman 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 Consistory. Active service consists of a five year term after which a one-year sabbatical is required. 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 or Minister of the Word 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.

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.

Pastors: Elders who are Ministers of the Word

The Church has historically recognized an ordained class of stewards serving the household of God (Titus 1:7). In the New Testament, the ministry is led by a combination of specially equipped ministers and mature men. The New Testament speaks of “servants” or “ministers” of the Church (*diakonos*) such as Paul, Timothy, Epaphras, and Tychicus (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7). While the New Testament uses the term “elder” synonymously with “bishop” and “pastor” to refer a class of officers (Acts 20:17-28), there are distinctions in the “ruling” and “teaching”

ministry of such officers (1 Tim. 5:17-18; 2 Tim. 3:17-4:2). We distinguish between “ruling elders” and those lawfully ordained to be Ministers of the Word. These are commonly called, “pastors.” Ministers of the Word represent the Lord in proclaiming His will in the public preaching of the Word and in leading in the administration of the sacraments (baptism and communion). The title of “pastor” is recognized in our church to specify persons who have such a calling to the work of the ministry and have been recognized by the Session and the congregation to serve in this capacity. Pastors and “ruling elders” co-labor together in shepherding the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-4). Yet, pastors and elders differ in respect to personal calling, labor in ministry, and remuneration. Each elder has the same formal authority (as in voting on the Session) in the church as each pastor.

Calling and Ordination of Pastors

Pastors called to minister to All Saints Church must be unanimously called by the Session and affirmed by the electors by a 3/4's majority vote. Each 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 a pastoral call, including compensation, vacation time, ministerial expenses, etc., shall determined by the Session and reviewed annually.

Dismissal and Termination of a Pastoral Call

While All Saints 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 from the office follows that which is discussed below for all elders. Changes in the calling of a pastor so as to be dismissed from service at All Saints Church for reasons other than for disciplinary action (below) are as follows: a) When a pastor desires to terminate his tenure in office, he shall duly inform the 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 All Saints Church by a unanimous vote of the Session (excluding said pastor). In such a case, the pastor may call for a vote of the electors to sustain his call or not. If the electors sustain his call by a two-thirds majority vote, the elders may either concede to the congregation and withdraw recommendation to terminate the pastor's call or refer the matter to presbytery for binding arbitration.

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 administering the annual budget, building maintenance, fellowship meals, subordinate ministries as needed, and benevolence.

The business of the deacons will be conducted at diaconal meetings or in Consistory. Accurate minutes of such meetings will be kept and the deacons will give regular reports relating to finances and ministry to the Session and to the heads of households.

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.

The business of the church which involves both the elders and deacons shall be conducted during meetings of the Consistory of the church. The Consistory is made up of all (active service) pastors, elders and deacons of the church. Meetings of Consistory will focus on the financial, physical, social, and benevolent functions of the church (Acts 6:2-4; 1 Tim. 5:17). Consistory responsibilities include preparing, administering, and approving the annual budget, building maintenance, fellowship meals, reviewing practical aspects of ministries, office support, and administration of the benevolence fund. Quorum for this meeting shall consist of a simple majority of the officers of the church. In Consistory, each officer shall have one vote.

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 through the heads of households 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 Elders and 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 Session (1 Tim. 5:19). If the Session (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 heads of households of the charges, announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or hearing, and encourage the heads of households 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 heads of households 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 Session. The pattern of church discipline will include formal private admonition by two or three (Matt. 18:16), then formal public admonition in a heads of household meeting, then suspension from the Eucharist (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. Unbaptized 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 Eucharist and rejected after proper admonition (1 Tim. 3:10). If another church has disciplined one of its members, and that person subsequently comes to All Saints 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 Session 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 Session shall formally announce the restoration.

Appeals to Presbytery

Members of All Saints Church may appeal the actions of the Session to the presbytery and/or council of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. Any appeals to presbytery will be conducted in accordance with the Constitution of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

WORSHIP

The Covenantal Form of Worship

The Lord's Day worship service of All Saints Church is understood to be a service of renewing the covenantal relationship between God and His people. Thus, we celebrate the feast of the Eucharist weekly and enjoin all baptized members of the covenant to participate. The order of our worship follows the biblical pattern of call, confession, consecration through the Word, communion, and a commission to go forth and serve."

The Schedule of Worship and Church Meetings

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. All Saints Church accepts the historic Western Church Calendar, and therefore seeks to punctuate the Lord's Day services with appropriate celebrations in the seasons of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Other ministries, services, and meetings shall be scheduled according to the needs of the congregation at the discretion of the Session in accordance with God's Word, such as biblical and theological classes for further ministry training, special conferences and seminars, fellowship activities, and outreach ministries.

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).

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 from member households in good standing may be baptized at the Pastor's discretion. Those desiring baptism who are not from member households must be approved by the Session. Adults should confess their allegiance to Christ prior to baptism. Minor children in the households of Christians should be baptized on the basis of one or more parent's covenantal duties and covenantal inclusion (Acts 16:31-34). The Session shall defer to the head of each household regarding the time and circumstances of the baptism of children in the household.

The Eucharist

The Lord's Supper or Eucharist 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 in a worthy manner believers spiritually feed upon Christ, renew their union and communion with Him, acknowledge His redemptive work on their behalf, and renew their thankfulness for His saving work, as well as spiritually commune with other believers (Luke 22:20; Mat. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Cor. 10:14-21).

Recipients of the Eucharist

The Eucharist is for all the Lord's people. Hence, we practice "open communion" as defined in the following way: We encourage all baptized Christians (not censured under church discipline) to celebrate the feast of the Eucharist and so commune with Christ in His body. The Eucharist is integral to the act of confession, repentance, renewal, and abiding in Christ. Moreover, it is our conviction that the Eucharist should be received by all baptized covenant members who are able to physically eat and drink the elements, including young children being raised in the discipline and admonition of the Lord. Under the headship of Christ, the responsibility for administering the sacraments remains with the Session. The Session shall defer to the view of the head of each household regarding the appropriate age for baptized children to partake of the Eucharist.

Amending the Constitution or Book of Confessions

The Constitution and Book of Confessions may be amended through unanimous consent of the Session, after approval is indicated by a majority vote of the heads of households. The amendment process requires that notice of the vote be scheduled at least three weeks in advance of each elector receiving the proposed revisions.

Dissolution of the Congregation

Upon dissolution of the congregation of All Saints Church, the assets of the church shall be distributed to other churches in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

* * *

Amendments and Changes: This Constitution was duly received and unanimously approved in October 2002. It was amended in January 2007 to add the clause relating to Dissolution. The paragraph under “Release or Transfer of Membership” was amended in August 2010. January 2013 amendments relate to transitioning young adult members, the use of a Consistory meeting, the name change of the CREC to the “Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches,” as well as minor stylist changes. April 2015 amendments were as follows: the change to 3/4’s majority for officer elections, rewording on transfer and dismissal from membership, rewording on Diaconal responsibilities, rewording on Consistory functioning, and the addition of Church Calendar seasons to our Worship description. April 2016 amendments were as follows: updating the vision statement; the change to 3/4’s majority for Pastor elections; budget approval by the Consistory rather than Session; change to pastoral discretion on baptismal candidates; church-related concerns and complaints should be addressed to the appropriate individuals first, if possible (Matt. 18:15ff); as well as minor stylistic changes. April 2017 amendments: the mandatory sabbatical of officers (after five years of active service), as well as minor stylistic changes. April 2018 amendments: a clarifying change to specify the nature and quantity of a special vote; the addition of a Pastoral sabbatical; and specifications on the process of discipline; May 2019 amendments: stylistic changes and edited description of pastors. December 2019 the congregation voted to amend our organizing documents with the following declarations: Our congregation is duly constituted as a religious organization under the terms of the Internal Revenue Service’s 501c3 section and therefore our disbursements of funds are consistent with this purpose; upon our dissolution our assets will only be disbursed to other organizations consistent with 501c3 purposes.