

Constitution



Reformed Baptist Church

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Preamble

Placing our faith wholly in the Lord Jesus Christ for our salvation, and believing in the verbal-plenary inspiration of the Holy Bible, we affiliated ourselves with one another as a body of immersed believers, and we adopt this constitution as a declaration of our convictions so that we may carry on the Lord's work decently and in order.

Article I - Name

The name of this organization shall be the Reformed Baptist Church of Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Article II - Purpose

The purpose of this church is to:

- A. **Love and glorify God the Father, Son, and Spirit.** We will accomplish this, by the grace of God, according to the Word of God, through our worship, service, praise, proclamation, thanksgiving, and by our faith and obedience to God.
- B. **Build up and strengthen one another so that we all become more like Jesus Christ.** We will accomplish this, by the grace of God, through our love for one another expressed in: the teaching and instruction of the Word of God, the use of our God-given gifts, giving of our material goods, discipleship, fellowship, hospitality, intercession, exhortation, encouragement, and when necessary – biblical discipline.
- C. **Advance the Kingdom of God through the proclamation and defense of the gospel.** We will accomplish this, by the grace of God, through supporting and actively participating in local evangelism and in worldwide missions.

Article III - Government

We joyfully acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Lord and Head of the Church. He reigns over us and we belong to Him. Through the Holy Scriptures and by the Spirit of God, Jesus Christ guides and directs our local church. Furthermore, we believe that the church is to be governed by a group of godly men, usually called "elders" in the Holy Scriptures.

- A. The relationship between the leadership and the congregation must be one of mutual love and respect. The elders are to lead as humble servants by godly example and biblical instruction. The congregation is to respond by submission and obedience to the leadership so that their work may be done with joy. The elders will support and lead the church in fulfilling its purpose and its biblical congregational responsibilities.
- B. We joyfully and exclusively submit to Jesus Christ and the instruction of His Apostles as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. We do not recognize any other individuals or institutions as having authority over our local church. We are an independent church which voluntarily cooperates with other churches and groups of like faith and practice.

Article IV - Covenant

Having been led as we believe by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into this covenant with one another as one body in Christ.

We purpose, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love, to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness and comfort, to promote its prosperity and spirituality, to sustain its worship, ordinances, for the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and spread of the gospel through all nations.

We also purpose to maintain family and private devotions, to educate our children according to the Word of God, to seek the salvation of our relatives and friends, to walk circumspectly in the world, to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements and exemplary in our behavior, to avoid all gossip, backbiting, and excessive anger, and to be zealous to advance the kingdom of our dear Savior.

We further purpose to watch over one another in brotherly love, to remember each other in prayer, to aid each other in sickness and distress, to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy of speech, to be slow in taking offense but always ready for reconciliation, being mindful of the words of our Lord, and to secure it without delay.

We moreover purpose that when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of the Word of God.

Article V - Articles of Faith

This church accepts the Holy Scriptures, consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments to be the only inerrant and all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. These Scriptures are the inscripturated Word of God, wholly inerrant, verbally inspired, and the only standard by which all creeds and confessions, whether personal or corporate, are judged.

This church recognizes *The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* to be the confession which *most closely* summarizes our own understanding of the Scriptures. This confession is not held to be an infallible and authoritative rule for faith and practice. Believers are bound only to Scripture, by the whole Scripture, and nothing but Scripture. At the same time, however, we find it absolutely necessary to have a clear statement of the faith we believe, practice, teach and commend to all men. This church, therefore, accepts and adopts this confession as its own confession and as a document that maintains doctrinal precision in summarizing the contents of Scripture.

The London Baptist Confession of Faith is an excellent summary of our faith and we claim this confession under the Word of God as our confession with the following additions and clarifications.

A. Additions

Separation

Though not dealt with in the confession, the position of this church on the issue of separation is as follows. We believe in the Biblical authority for and imperative of personal and ecclesiastical separation. The modern ecumenical movement violates this principle and should be shunned by all Bible-believing Christians (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Gal. 1:8-9; Eph. 5:11; 2 Thess. 2:14-15; 2 Tim. 2:15-21; 1 John 2:19; 2 John 10-11; Titus 3:10-11).

B. Clarifications

While the elders of this church hold to definite convictions in each of the following areas, they also recognize that individuals who can be called Reformed Baptist in every sense of the word sometimes have differing convictions in some of these areas. Therefore, this church will allow for a measure of individual liberty among members in determining their personal convictions with reference to the following theological issues:

1. Covenant Theology

We believe that God has from all eternity had only one purpose, plan, and people. We allow our members to determine for themselves, however, the extent to which they embrace a systematized covenant theology [Ch. 7; 9 (Art. 6-7); 20 (Art. 1)].

2. The Status of Infants

We do not believe the Bible is sufficiently clear on the issue of whether children who die in infancy are regenerated and, therefore, go to heaven. It is clear, however, that if any or all infants do go to heaven when they die, it is because they have been regenerated by the sovereign grace of God and are justified by the blood of Christ. We, therefore, allow for a measure of liberty in this area [Ch. 10 (Art. 3)].

3. The Moral Law

We recognize that the moral law of God, as a reflection of the unchanging character of God, never changes and is forever binding. With reference to the Sabbath-Lord's Day issue, we believe that the Bible teaches that the Christian is duty-bound to set aside his own labors on the Lord's Day and give that day over to the worship of his God. However, we allow our members to determine the particular outworking or the principles of rest and worship in their own lives [Ch. 19 (Art. 2, 5-7); 22 (Art. 7-8)].

4. Eschatology

While we believe strongly that the second coming of Christ is to be a public and glorious event, we will not insist upon the adoption of a specific millennial view as a condition for membership [Ch. 26 (Art. 4); 32].

Final Comment

Though this assembly recognizes *The London Baptist Confession of 1689* to be the confession which most closely summarizes its own understanding of the Scriptures, we also are in agreement with the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordt, the Belgic Confession of Faith, the Westminster Confession, and especially the Philadelphia Baptist Confession in so far as these confessions are in agreement with

this assembly's understanding of the Scriptures as taught in *The London Baptist Confession of 1689*. It is this assembly's basic agreement with the doctrines taught in these historic confessions that enable it to be referred to as a *Reformed* Baptist Church.

Article VI - Membership

A. Eligibility

The membership of this church shall consist of persons who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who have subsequently been baptized by immersion, who give assurance of their willingness to obey the Word of God, who are in fundamental agreement with the articles of faith and practice stated in this constitution, who are willing to submit to the government of this church, who are not under biblically warranted discipline from any other church of like faith and practice, and who are not members of any secret society.

B. Application

All applications for membership shall be made to the elders. All applicants shall be required to meet with the elders for a membership interview, share their personal testimony of salvation and Christian experience, and if approved for membership, shall be given opportunity to share their testimony before the church. It shall be the responsibility of the elders to determine the eligibility of the applicants as described above.

C. Admission

Applicants who have been approved by the elders for admission into membership will sign an accountability form, have the right hand of fellowship extended to them at a Sunday service, and their names will be added to the membership roll, noting the date they joined and how they were received into membership. Those who have not been baptized will be received into membership through baptism. Those who have previously been baptized will be received into the church through transfer, profession of faith, or restoration, upon the recommendation of the elders.

D. Duties

1. Members shall strive to keep their covenant obligations. They should honor and esteem their pastors and pray for them daily. They will endeavor to preserve the unity of the church and, if at any time they find themselves opposed to the fundamental doctrines of this church, they will not seek to disrupt its fellowship, but will seek out the elders for special counsel. If a satisfactory solution is not found, they will withdraw from its membership.
2. Every member of this church is expected to attend its meetings, work for its up-building, guard its name in the community, and contribute regularly and according to his ability for the expenses of the church.
3. Members shall strive to keep the elders and deacons informed of spiritual or material needs.
4. Support for this church shall be through voluntary offerings.

E. Removal

Church membership is a serious matter and it should not be terminated lightly. Members may be removed from the church through:

1. Transfer. A member in good standing who requests to be dismissed to the fellowship of another church of like faith and practice will be granted a letter of transfer upon a request from the church they wish to join. A member in good standing who requests to be removed from this church in order to unite with a church not of like faith and practice will be granted a letter of Christian character upon a request from the church they wish to join.
2. Excommunication. When a person is excommunicated, their name will be removed from the membership roll.
3. Termination. In cases where a transfer or excommunication is not applicable, a member in good standing may be removed at the discretion of the elders.
4. Death. When any member is removed from our midst through death, their name will be removed from the roll. We take comfort knowing that these names remain in the Book of Life!

When a person is removed, the name, date, and reason that the person was removed will be recorded.

Article VII - Officers

A. General Statement

The following section applies to both elders and deacons.

1. Qualifications

All elders and deacons, as well as anyone who teaches in this church, shall:

- a. Give evidence of a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.
- b. Agree with the fundamental doctrines of this church.
- c. Be loyal to the leadership of this church.
- d. Be separated to God from worldliness.
- e. Be a member of this church.
- f. Regularly attend the services of this church.
- g. Practice personal and family devotions.
- h. Have a good reputation in their home, community and place of employment.

2. Call

While recognizing that it is Christ, the Head of the church, who appoints His office bearers, we also recognize our responsibility as a local assembly to discern and acknowledge His divine appointments in our midst. To this end, the following three-step procedure will be followed in the appointment of all elders and deacons.

a. Nomination

Any member of this church may submit the name of any male member or his own name, provided he is a male, for consideration by the elders for the office of either elder or deacon.

Any member submitted for consideration for office in this church must meet the qualifications listed in Article VII, Sections A1 and B1, for the office of elder and the qualifications listed in Article VII, Sections A1 and C1, for the office of deacon.

b. Evaluation

The elders will evaluate each name submitted according to the biblical guidelines referred to above. If a candidate meets the biblical requirements of the office, receives unanimous recommendation from the elders, and is willing to serve, his name will be submitted to the congregation for consideration.

For a period of not less than four weeks, the congregation will be given opportunity to state any biblical reasons why the candidate should not be ordained to office. If objections are forthcoming, the elders will carefully, objectively, and confidentially investigate them, taking as much time as necessary to do so. If the objections are valid in the judgment of the elders, the ordination will either be postponed until the problem can be resolved or will not go forward, at the discretion of the elders. If the objections are not valid in the judgment of the elders, ordination will take place as planned.

c. Ordination

All candidates for office who have completed the above procedure shall be ordained to office by the laying on of hands of the existing eldership. The ordination ceremony shall take place at a regular service of the church and shall be announced for at least two weeks before it occurs

3. Tenure

The tenure of both elders and deacons shall be indefinite.

4. Evaluations

Elders and deacons dramatically affect the unity, purity, beliefs, and direction of the church. Therefore, these officers will be regularly evaluated for the spiritual welfare of the church. Since these men labor so hard for the church, and the Scriptures teach us to esteem our leaders, the tone of these evaluations will be positive, edifying, and encouraging. Each evaluation will be a God-honoring process based upon scriptural principles designed to help keep the leadership focused, strengthened, and accountable. The evaluations will follow this process:

- a. The elders will conduct a regular evaluation every two years for each officer. Additionally the elders may call for a special evaluation of any officer at any time an officer's qualifications or effectiveness may be in question, an accusation is brought against an elder in accord with 1 Tim 5:19, or an officer wishes to remove himself from office.
- b. The elders will request congregational feedback prior to every regular evaluation through a confidential questionnaire to help determine the officer's effectiveness in ministry. Only the elders, excluding an elder under review, will view the responses
- c. The elders will meet privately with the officer under review. At the evaluation, the officer will freely acknowledge any deviations from the Articles of Faith. The officer's life and ministry will be measured against the standard given in 1 Tim. 3:1-13 and Tit. 1:5-9. The elders will carefully examine him to make sure he is still biblically qualified to hold the office and evaluate the effectiveness of his ministry. They will lovingly admonish him concerning his weaknesses and commend him for his strengths.
- d. All officers will continue in office unless the majority of the elders determine that he should step down from his office. If it is an elder being evaluated, the decision will come from the remaining elders.

- e. A special business meeting will be called to announce the removal of any officer. If a public rebuke is necessary, the elders will carry out this difficult task (1 Tim. 5:20). The results of all other officer evaluations will be reported to the congregation at the next business meeting.

5. Meetings

The elders and deacons will meet as a full board once a month to conduct the business of the church. In addition, the elders and deacons may meet, separately or together, more often as considered necessary. These meetings are an opportunity for members to express their material and spiritual needs and to share any special concerns they have about the leadership and body life of our church. To this end, any member may attend any leadership meeting, provided advance notice is given.

B. Elders

In the following section the term “elder” refers to men holding the biblical office generally while the term “pastor-teacher” refers to the man or men who are regularly engaged in the pulpit ministry of the church.

1. Qualifications

The office of elder shall be regarded as a divine appointment, and it shall not be lightly formed nor rudely severed. The elders of this church shall fulfill all of the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. They shall be believers in and preachers of all of the Articles of Faith accepted by this constitution (Article V).

2. Call of Pastor-Teacher

- a. The pulpit committee shall be comprised of the elders and deacons.
- b. When it becomes necessary to call a pastor-teacher, the pulpit committee shall, without unnecessary delay, investigate a minister of the gospel who is of good report and carefully examine him as to his salvation, doctrine, Christian conduct, and call to the ministry. He shall be required to state in writing his adherence to the articles of faith, covenant, and constitution of this church. He shall be invited to supply the pulpit for a Sunday and to state whether or not he is willing to be considered for the pastorate.
- c. Only one candidate shall be considered at a time.
- d. A call to the pastor-teacher shall be extended at a meeting of the church called for that purpose and announced from the pulpit for two Sundays immediately preceding that meeting. A three-fourths majority vote is required to extend a call. Voting shall be by secret ballot.
- e. If the church votes to extend a call to the candidate, a written call and agreement shall be presented to him. This call shall give all of the details of the church-pastoral relationship, including salary, housing, vacation, etc., after these matters have been discussed with the pastor-teacher and mutually agreed upon.

3. Duties

- a. The elders’ special duties are, according to the Scriptures, the giving of themselves to prayer, the ministry of the Word, the administration and oversight of the ordinances, the pastoral oversight of the flock, and the general guidance of the spiritual welfare of the church (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Acts 6:4; 1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17).
- b. An elder shall be a moderator of all business meetings of the church.

- c. The elders shall be ex-officio leaders of all organized groups and committees connected with the church.
- d. All personnel of the church are to be approved by the elders.

C. Deacons

1. Qualifications

All men serving in the office of deacon must meet all the qualifications given in Acts 6:1-6 and 1Timothy 3:8-13

2. Duties

The deacons' special duties are, according to the Scriptures, to see that the material needs and concerns of the church are met. Specifically, the deacon shall:

- a. Collect, record, and dispense the monies of the church in an orderly fashion, under the headship of the elders, with accountability to the members, and in accordance with the laws of the land, provided these laws are not contrary to Scripture.
- b. Maintain a benevolence fund for charity and emergency use. Benevolent offerings shall also be considered a part of this fund. The deacons shall be sovereign in giving from this fund, and they need not give account to the church or make public their use of these monies except for strict financial disclosure.
- c. Care for the property of the church and shall hold, repair, invest, and preserve the same. No officer of this church shall have the authority to buy, sell, lease, rent, take out a loan, or handle church property in any manner to exceed the amount of moneys budgeted without church approval.

D. Other Offices

Other offices and positions may be created by the elders as needed. All additional officers must meet all of the requirements listed in Article VII, Section A1. Any additional positions involving a salary must be approved by the church with regard to the position and salary involved.

Article VIII - The Ordinances

The Bible teaches that the Lord Jesus Christ has left two ordinances for His church to observe until He returns. These ordinances are baptism and the Lord's Supper. Though these ordinances are great aids to a believer's growth and progress in grace, we believe they are aids only. Neither the waters of baptism nor the bread and the cup of the Lord's Table impart grace to the participants or have any saving merit.

A. Baptism

Baptism according to the Scriptures is an initiatory ordinance which takes place only once and has a three-fold purpose:

- 1. It is a picture of the believer's union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.
- 2. It is a picture of the fact that the believer's sins have been washed away by the blood of Christ and through faith in His atoning sacrifice.
- 3. It is the God-ordained means for the believer to unite with the local church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 5:13-14). For this reason, we will receive into membership only those who have been baptized by immersion after their conversion, and we will baptize only those persons who desire to unite with our church.

B. The Lord's Supper

The Scriptures teach that the Lord's Supper is to be observed by believers only, and only by believers who are walking in obedience to God and are in fellowship with their brothers in Christ. For this

reason, the elders shall seek to maintain the purity of this ordinance by insisting through both private and public exhortation that all those who participate in the Lord's Supper:

1. Be regenerate and living lives consistent with their profession.
2. Be members of an evangelical local church.
3. Not be knowingly tolerating any situation or circumstance which is causing division between themselves and any other brother or sister in Christ. All those who meet these biblical criteria are welcomed to the table of the Lord.

Article IX - Teachers

James said, "Not many of you should act as teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." Because God has high standards for those who would teach His Word, the following standards will be applied to all teachers in this church.

- A. All teachers must meet the qualifications detailed in Article VII, Section A.
- B. It is further expected that all teachers will study diligently for their classes, pray for their pupils, seek to grow in teaching skills, attend teachers' meetings, and call on their class members as necessary.

Article X - Committees

Committees are sometimes needed to implement change, work on projects, and achieve certain goals. Therefore committees will be formed and dissolved as necessary by or under the direction of the elders. All committee members will serve at the discretion of the elders. Each committee shall be responsible to the elders for its work. Although the elders are ex-officio leaders of all committees the deacons will be entrusted with overseeing the committees which pertain to their office.

Article XI - Meetings

A. Quorum

The active members present and voting at any business meeting shall constitute a quorum.

B. Qualifications for Voting

Only active members of the church who are 18 years old or older, and are not in the process of church discipline, are eligible to vote.

C. Rules

1. Robert's Rules of Order shall be the parliamentary manual for this church. If there is any conflict between this constitution and Robert's Rules of Order, the provisions of this constitution shall stand.
2. A simple majority vote of qualified and voting members at any business meeting called in accordance with the requirements of this constitution shall be required to pass all items brought before the church unless otherwise stated in this constitution.
3. All elections of officers, purchase of property, expenditure of funds, and such other matters as deemed wise by the chairman shall be voted on by secret ballot. All other decisions may be made by voice or show of hands.

D. Absentee Ballots

Absentee ballots will be permitted for all elections of officers and specially-announced business to members in good standing if due to an unavoidable absence. The request for such a ballot must be made to an elder by the Sunday prior to the business meeting.

E. Schedule

1. We will regularly assemble every Sunday morning and evening to worship God (Acts 2:42-47; Heb 10:24-25; 2 Tim 4:1-4; London Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 22, Art. 5-6).
2. Special business meetings may be called at any time by the elders. Prior notice of the meeting must detail the time and purpose of the meeting and must be given at two regular services of the church.
3. One business meeting shall be held during the second quarter.
4. One annual business meeting shall be held during the fourth quarter. At this meeting, annual reports on all standing committees shall be presented to the church, a resume of the year's work shall be prepared by the elders and presented, and the budget for the ensuing year shall be voted on.

Article XII - Policies

A. Financial

1. The fiscal year shall be the calendar year.
2. This church is a non-profit organization and shall be financed only by voluntary offerings.
3. No financial obligation in any form shall be placed upon this church in excess of the amount of moneys budgeted without a church vote. Voting shall be by secret ballot.
4. The elders and deacons shall prepare a budget for church approval at the annual business meeting.
5. There shall be only one treasury for the whole church.

B. Missionary

1. It shall be the policy of this church to support missions which are in fundamental agreement with the doctrinal positions of this church.
2. If a missions agency is involved, the elders or deacons will make the congregation aware of any doctrinal or financial concerns.

C. Marriage

All weddings performed by an elder of this church and weddings performed in this church building must be in agreement with the RBC Christian Lifestyle Statement, between two Christians, and approved by the elders.

D. Auxiliary Organizations

1. No organization shall be formed or considered a part of this church before its sponsors have submitted their plans to the elders for sanction and until approval has been granted.
2. All officers, regular workers, and regular teachers having to do with any function of this church shall be members of this church in good standing.

Article XIII - Properties

A. Acquisition

All purchase of property and building or new buildings or major remodeling of facilities must be recommended by the elders and deacons and approved by the church.

B. Dissolution

1. In case of organic division of the church membership, church property shall belong to those members who abide by this constitution.
2. In case of total disbanding of this church, the physical properties shall be sold, and the total gain shall be distributed among the missionaries and missionary organizations who maintain the doctrinal convictions set forth in this constitution.

Article XIV - Amendments

This constitution may be amended at any business meeting of the church by a simple majority of the total membership who are eligible to vote provided that:

- A. The proposed amendment has been posted for at least two consecutive Sundays prior to the meeting to vote.
- B. All legal requirements of the state of Michigan have been met so long as these requirements are not in conflict with the Scriptures.

Article XV - Christian Lifestyle Statement

In view of the need for Christians to maintain biblical standards in a secular society, and considering that some churches/denominations who define themselves as “Christian” have departed from historical Christian orthodoxy pertaining to moral lifestyle, the elders, deacons, and congregation of The Reformed Baptist Church of Kalamazoo affirm the following statement on Christian lifestyle.

1. We *affirm* that the Bible clearly reveals God’s will for the lifestyle of His redeemed people. We *deny* that biblical standards in such areas as the family and sexuality are outdated in modern times. [Deuteronomy 4:2; Psalm 119:89; Matthew 5:17-19; Mark 13:31; Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6-11]
2. We *affirm* that human sexuality is a good gift from God to be received with thanksgiving and to be enjoyed only in the context of the marriage covenant. We *deny* that sexual activity outside of marriage is necessary for the full development of human personhood but rather violates human personhood and is sin against God. [Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18-25; Proverbs 5:18-19; Song of Songs; Hebrews 13:4]
3. We *affirm* that God in the Bible defines marriage as a life-long, exclusive covenant between a man and a woman. We *deny* that same-sex relationships constitute marriage in the biblical sense. [Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:3-9; Romans 7:2-3]

4. We *affirm* that only within marriage as defined in #3 above is sexual activity pleasing to God. We *deny* that homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, bestiality, adultery, premarital sex, or pornography are pleasing to God but rather are moral abominations to Him. [Exodus 20:14, 17; Leviticus 18; Matthew 5:27-30; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 9-13; 6:9-10, 13-20; 7:3-5, 8-9; Ephesians 5:3-5]
5. We *affirm* that the above four guidelines are clearly based on scripture and therefore constitute the will of God for the elders, deacons, and congregation of The Reformed Baptist Church of Kalamazoo and all persons who profess to be Christians who are under our pastoral care, and we further *affirm* that the above four guidelines shall serve as a basis for pastoral care and discipline. We *deny* that the use of the above four guidelines is motivated by anything other than a reverent fear of and love for Almighty God our Maker, Redeemer, and Judge, and our sincere desire to obey His commandments revealed in scripture.

Acceptance of Statement

Acceptance of the RBC Constitution means full agreement with this statement as the condition of a person's acceptance and continuation at The Reformed Baptist Church of Kalamazoo. Failure to maintain the standards required by this statement will result in pastoral admonition and/or dismissal from membership at the discretion of the elders and the congregation.