

THE ENGLISH REFORMED CHURCH CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE AND DECLARATION

WHEREAS it has pleased Almighty God graciously to call into being a congregation of believers in Randburg, South Africa,

AND WHEREAS the members of this congregation recognize the hand of the Lord upon them and desire to "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,"¹

AND WHEREAS the members of the congregation declare and acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be their Saviour and King, whose will, revealed in the Holy Scriptures, it is their duty and joy to obey,

WE, the members of the congregation desire to order and constitute ourselves into a more effective organization for the glory of God.

THE CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE 1. NAME

The name of this congregation shall be The English Reformed Church (hereafter referred to as "this Church").

ARTICLE 2. DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

This Church is a member of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches of Southern Africa and adheres to its formularies.

ARTICLE 3. AUTHORITY

A. Authority of Christ

We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ,² who is the Head of the Church and who directs the affairs of the church through Elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture.³ The Elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand under the authority of Holy Scripture.

B. Articles of Faith

The ultimate authority in all matters of faith, order and morals are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments which we acknowledge to be the inspired, inerrant Word of God. By way of definition and summary of our confession of faith we adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith with its related Larger and Shorter Catechisms and the Canons of Dort. We also acknowledge the Heidelberg Catechism,

the Belgic Confession and the Savoy Declaration to be sound summaries of Christian belief. Our adoption of the Westminster Confession does not prevent those who hold other views on baptism and/or the millennium from membership or holding office.

ARTICLE 4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aims and objects of this Church shall be:

- a) To provide for the worship of God in accordance with the precepts and principles laid down in Scripture;⁴
- b) To provide for the proper nurture, edification and discipline of the body of Christ to the end that we may be able to "present every one perfect in Christ";⁵ and
- c) To carry out the Lord's commission to "go and make disciples of all nations" to the best of our ability.⁶

ARTICLE 5. LEGAL STATUS

The congregation of the English Reformed Church shall, in terms of the Secular Law be a voluntary Association with full legal personality, with perpetual succession and the power to hold property in its own name, distinct from its members and capable of being sued and suing in its own name.

Immovable Property

- a) This church shall be entitled to:
 - i) buy, sell, lease or rent immovable property
 - ii) encumber in any way, any immovable property registered or to be registered in the name of the Church, including the registration of mortgaged bonds of the same.
 - iii) borrow funds to achieve the above purposes.
- b) Any resolution authorizing any of the above purposes shall be passed and signed by all the Elders for the time being of this Church.

ARTICLE 6. MEMBERSHIP

Any person who professes repentance towards God and faith towards Lord Jesus Christ,⁷ who manifests a life transformed by the power of Christ, who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines and aims of this church and who is willing to submit to its government is eligible for membership.

Further,

- a) The members of this Church shall be at least 18 years of age who have applied to the Church Council for membership and admitted as such.
- b) No person shall be entitled to vote at any congregational meeting or to hold any office whatever in this church unless he or she be a member.
- c) Members' children under the age of 18 shall be entitled to all the benefits of membership without the right to vote.
- d) We recognize as continuing members of this church those who have moved away from the church and who cannot find a local church with which they can conscientiously unite. Such members are nevertheless urged to seek diligently a church to which membership can be transferred.

ARTICLE 7. APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

A. New Applicants

All who qualify for membership should apply to the Elders who on being satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership shall present the same at the subsequent Sunday services. If no objection is raised concerning the applicant's manner of life and doctrines that person shall be received into membership.

B. Transfer

If the applicant has been a member of another church, the Elders are required to determine the person's standing in their previous church and the reason for leaving before processing the application as above.

C. Associate Membership

Having regard to the times, applications for associate membership from persons who, by reason of distance, are prevented from worshipping with us, will be sympathetically considered. Such associate membership does not include the right to vote at any congregational meeting.

ARTICLE 8. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

Membership is terminated by death, transfer, exclusion or excommunication.

- a) With regard to transfer the Elders, when requested to do so, may issue a letter of transfer to another church, in respect of the departing member being in good standing. No such letter can be given where the individual is under the corrective discipline of the church or where such transfer is to a church who, in their judgement, is disloyal to the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints"⁸ or which does not exercise godly care over its members.

- b) With regard to exclusion the Church Council shall exclude from membership, after giving notice to such member its intention to do so, any person who habitually absents himself from the meetings of the church, whose restoration has been urged and who shows no evidence of repentance or any person who request termination of membership.
- c) With regard to excommunication the teachings of Scripture compel a congregation to exclude from its fellowship and membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to heretical doctrine, or who blatantly and persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the Church.⁹

ARTICLE 9. ANNUAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

A General meeting of the Congregation shall be held annually within four months of the end of the financial year on a date to be decided by the Church Council. Such meeting shall be called the Annual Congregational Meeting (A.C.M.).

a) Quorum

A quorum shall be a simple majority of Elders and Deacons plus at least 20 voting members of the congregation.

b) Voting and Proxies

Voting shall be by show of hands unless the meeting unanimously agrees to a ballot. A member who is unable to attend a meeting may appoint a proxy to record his vote. Written notice signed by the member must be in the hand of the Secretary before the meeting is duly constituted.

c) Chairman

The Annual Congregational Meeting will be chaired by one of the Elders.

d) Minutes

The Council Secretary will take proper minutes of the meeting.

e) Business/Agenda

- i) The A.C.M. shall approve annually the following officers:
 - 1. Elders.
 - 2. Deacons.

ii) The A.C.M. shall receive, consider and adopt (or take such other actions as it may deem advisable) reports on all aspects of the Lord's work to be submitted by the Elders and the Deacons. Reports shall include:-

1. A report from the Elders.
 2. A report from the Deacons, which shall include an audited financial statement and report.
- iii) Any member or members may bring up any matter for the attention and/or action of the A.C.M. provided that at least two weeks' notice in writing of the intention to do so is given to the Secretary and the nature of the business is stated concisely.
- iv) Copies of the Agenda should be made available to the congregation at least two Sundays before the meeting and should include an item for "Any Other Business".

f) Time and Situation

Notice of the place, date and time of the Annual Congregational Meeting shall be given by announcement at the Sunday Services for at least three consecutive weeks commencing at least five weeks beforehand and by affixing a written notice at least five weeks beforehand on the Church notice Board, by the Secretary.

ARTICLE 10. SPECIAL CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

A Special Meeting of the Congregation may be held at any time, provided that:

- a) A notice calling for the meeting is signed by at least 10 church members or the Elders or the Deacons.
- b) The nature of the business to be dealt with is clearly stated on the notice.
- c) The notice is addressed to the Secretary, who shall be obliged to give notice of the meeting to the congregation in the manner prescribed for the Annual Congregational Meeting.

The quorum shall be the same as for an Annual Congregational Meeting.

ARTICLE 11. EMERGENCY CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

In an emergency an Emergency Congregational Meeting may be called by a 75% majority of the Church Council. Seven days notice shall be required for an Emergency Meeting, the notice of which shall be given at every Church meeting held throughout the seven day period and a written notice to be fixed

to the notice board, stating clearly the nature of the emergency, by the Secretary.

ARTICLE 12. OFFICE BEARERS

The Lord Jesus Christ, as king and Head of His body, the church, equips every member for service.¹⁰ He equips and appoints some to the office of Elder and others to the office of Deacon, so that the body may be established and built up in the faith. While all the work of God is correctly called spiritual work, yet Scripture makes the distinction between that work which ministers to the spiritual needs of the flock and that which ministers to their practical needs.¹¹

a) Duties of Elders

Elders are responsible to God and the congregation for the spiritual nurturing and protection of the flock of God.¹² The Lord Jesus appoints Elders as the need arises to administer His Church.

It is evident from Scripture that all Elders rule and must be apt to teach, and that some Elders are also called to full-time preaching and teaching ministry.¹³

Elders specifically are:

- i) To provide for the regular exposition of the Word of God.
- ii) To shepherd by teaching, prayer and counselling, those souls committed to their care.
- iii) To deal with all allegations of misconduct or heresy brought by one member of the church against another.
- iv) To consider and approve or reject, applications for membership of the church.

b) Duties of Deacons

Deacons are responsible to God and the congregation:

- i) For the proper and efficient care of all property and church funds belonging to, entrusted to or administered by the English Reformed Church.
- ii) They shall appoint a Treasurer who will keep such proper books of accounts and records as are necessary to give a true and accurate indication of the finances of the church.
- iii) To seek out and provide for the material needs of all members of the congregation as they arise.

- iv) To co-ordinate, supervise and encourage all the various ministries of the church, such as hospital visitation, door-to-door evangelism, literature outreach, camps and conferences, sidesmen's duties, congregational meals and refreshments, social services, Sunday School and the like, and the practical necessities for the efficient running of all worship services and other meetings.

c) Procedure for the Election of Officers of the Church

It is clear from Scripture that two basic principles must be adhered to:

- i) Every member of the congregation should be involved in the election of office bearers.¹⁴
- ii) Elders are responsible for ensuring that only the men called of God are elected.^{15, 16}

These principles will be adhered to as follows:

- i) Any member has the right prayerfully to "put forward" a name for the office of Deacon or of Elder, to the Council Secretary.
- ii) The Elders will prayerfully examine the nominee put forward to ascertain whether he meets the Biblical qualifications required for the office and whether he has the call of God. If he does not qualify, the reasons will be given privately to the nominator. If the nominee does qualify, he will then be recognized as a candidate for the office of Elder or Deacon.
- iii) The banns for all the candidates will be called on three consecutive Sundays at all worship services. Every member of the congregation will then be under obligation prayerfully to consider the suitability of each candidate for his respective office. If any member knows any just cause or impediment why the candidate should not be recognized, he or she is duty bound to indicate so formally to the Elders. They will investigate the objection in the light of Scripture. If the objection is valid, the candidate will be asked to withdraw from the elections.

Should the objection be groundless or not on Biblical grounds, the objector will be informed. If the objector is satisfied, he will be expected to support the candidate at the elections.

- iv) A notice listing the candidates and their nominators should be placed on the Church notice board by the Secretary at least two Sundays prior to the A.C.M.

- v) If there are no valid objections, every member should vote in favour of the candidate at the congregational meeting.
- vi) Each candidate must receive an 80% vote in favour of his election at the Annual Congregational Meeting.

d) Annual Re-examination of Officers

As the call of God to the work of the gospel is not casual but permanent, each officer will be re-examined prayerfully each year in the procedure laid down under subheadings (c) iii), v) and vi) above.

e) The Council and its Meetings

The Council shall consist of the Elders and Deacons and shall meet at least once a quarter. A quorum shall be 50%. An Elder shall be elected to chair each meeting. An Agenda shall be prepared, giving notice of the meeting, and sent to each member at least fourteen days before each meeting, by the Secretary. Any member may submit items for the Agenda. Proper minutes and records of its proceedings shall be kept by the Secretary.

f) Meetings of the Elders

The Elders will meet every week to co-ordinate their work and for prayer.

g) The Meetings of Deacons

The Deacons shall meet at least once every month to plan for and co-ordinate the proper and efficient carrying out of their official duties. They shall elect a chairman, a treasurer and a secretary (who will also be Council Secretary) from among their Number.

- i) A quorum for ordinary and special meetings of the Deacons shall be 50%.
- ii) An agenda for each Ordinary Meeting of the Deacons shall be prepared by the Secretary and shall be posted or distributed to all Council members not less than 8 days before the day of the meeting.
- iii) The Secretary shall include on such agenda such items as any Council member may, before the day of its distribution in writing instruct him to include.
- iv) No business shall be dealt with at the meeting unless it appears on the agenda or unless a majority of the members present at the meeting agree to its being dealt with.

- v) Proper minutes and records of the meeting shall be kept by the Secretary.
- vi) All Elders are entitled to attend any Deacons' meeting as they may desire and participate and vote on any matter whatsoever.
- vii) A special Deacons' meeting shall be called at any time at the request of three members of the Council. Such request shall be addressed in writing to the Secretary stating the purpose, the date and the time for which the meeting is to be called, and the Secretary shall on receipt thereof immediately in writing notify the other members.

ARTICLE 13. ORDINATION

It is the Scriptural obligation of the congregation to publicly recognise and ordain from amongst its members those who have been endowed with specific gifts and are likewise called of God to minister in His Church.

ARTICLE 14. ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Alterations and additions to the Constitution shall only be made at a properly constituted Annual or Special Congregational Meeting and approved by a seventy-five percent of the members present and entitled to vote at such a meeting. Details of the amendments proposed should be available to the congregation and placed on the Church Notice board at least two Sundays prior to the meeting.

Adopted by the Congregation at _____

ON THIS _____ DAY OF _____

SIGNED:

_____ Elders

_____ Deacons

{A signed copy is attached to the minute book}

SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES IN CONSTITUTION

1.	MATTHEW	6 V 33		
2.	EPHESIANS	5 V 23		
3.	ACTS	20 V 28		
4.	COLOSSIANS	2 V 23		
5.	COLOSSIANS	1 V 28	MATTHEW	28 V 20
6.	MATTHEW	28 V 19		
7.	ACTS	20 V 21		
8.	JUDE	3		
9.	MATTHEW	18 V 15	1 CORINTHIANS	5 V 13
10.	EPHESIANS	4 V 11/13		
11.	ACTS	6 V 1/4		
12.	TITUS	1 V 7	1 PETER ACTS	5 V 2 20 V 28
13.	1 TIMOTHY	3 V 2	1 TIMOTHY	5 V 17
14.	ACTS	6 V 3		
15.	1 TIMOTHY 3			
16.	ACTS	6 V 3/4		