



Beverly Heights  
Presbyterian  
Church

# scattered seeds.

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## WHY THE CREC IS A GOOD CHOICE

ESSAYS ON CHOOSING OUR NEXT DENOMINATION



# THE ONLY THING HARDER . . .

By Nate Devlin, Senior Pastor

Since 1929, Beverly Heights Church has been a member of three denominations, none of which has been particularly stellar. We were founded as part of the United Presbyterian Church of North America, which experienced slow decline due to encroaching theological and cultural liberalism. In 1983 the UPCNA merged with the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) to form the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America (PCUSA). That merger automatically placed our church within the denomination and gave us a front row seat to their slow demise.

In 2007 we left the PCUSA for the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). Things went well for a while, but as we all know, the EPC started to drift left with the prevailing cultural tide. The denomination lost all credibility when it broke covenant with our congregation through its attempt at a hostile takeover of our Session and property. On January 26, 2025 we voted to leave the EPC. Since then, we've been an independent congregation, spending time recovering and discerning the good future God has in store for us.

I have said on a number of occasions over the last year-and-a-half that the only thing harder than getting out of a denomination would be getting into another one. Why would we even want to, given our track record and the history of our last three denominations? The short answer is because it is the right thing to do. In this edition of the Scattered Seeds Magazine we hope to make the case as to why it is right and why the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) is the best option for us.



*At our Annual meeting this September we will review our bylaws and vote to ratify them with any necessary revisions. Assuming all goes well, the Session will also likely present a motion regarding affiliation with the CREC in accord with our bylaws.*

## WHERE WE'VE BEEN

Over the last year, we as a congregation, and the Session in particular, have been asking the question whether or not we should affiliate with another denomination or remain independent. One of the reasons that question is so pressing is because we are (and always have been) a presbyterian church and there are certain distinctives that come with being presbyterian. Being presbyterian means that our church is ruled by a plurality of elders, which we call the Session. Being presbyterian also means subscribing to a confessional standard, historically the Westminster Confession of Faith. Finally, being presbyterian means communion with other congregations in a body we call a presbytery. We currently enjoy two marks of presbyterianism, but not the third. To remain presbyterian with integrity, we

need to join a presbytery. In my next article I hope to prove why presbyterianism is the form of government most consistent with Scripture.

If joining a presbytery is the right thing to do, then the question is, which presbyterian denomination do we join? Not all presbyterian denominations are created equal and a bad choice can be costly, in more ways than one. The Session reviewed a list of 94 presbyterian denominations. We eliminated all those outside of the U.S. and those that had less than 10 member churches, leaving 27 denominations. After evaluating the remaining 27, we were able to reduce the number to three viable options: the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and the CREC. Of these three options, the Session concluded that the CREC was the best option.



**Do you have questions? Now is the time to ask!  
Please reach out to a member of Session, we want  
to bring everyone in the congregation to the  
point of making a well informed decision come  
September.**

In September, the Bucer Presbytery (CREC) offered candidacy status to Beverly Heights as the best means by which to evaluate mutual compatibility. Your Session accepted the invitation at its October meeting, and

*I have said on a number of occasions over the last year-and-a-half that the only thing harder than getting out of a denomination would be getting into another one.*

entered into a vetting process that could take a year, but would not exceed two years, according to CREC policy. Session had the opportunity to meet with Bucer Presbytery leadership over the weekend of Kyle and Peter's ordination and to discuss what life in the CREC looks like. Our guests included Pastor Harold Guptill, Presiding Minister of Bucer Presbytery and Pastor Ray Barbeito of Christ Covenant Church in Shippensburg and Presiding Minister Pro Tempore. Pastor Ray is the man responsible for guiding our candidacy process.

#### **WHERE WE ARE**

As of today, we remain in candidate status. However, in late January, Pastor Ray contacted me to share that after consulting with Pastor

Harold, Bucer leadership concluded that it was appropriate to nominate BHPC as a seated member church at their spring retreat in April. I shared with Pastor Ray that this was encouraging news and that we were delighted to know that Bucer believes we qualify for membership.

However, I went on to share that at the start of our candidacy we communicated to the congregation that the process would likely take a year but would not exceed two and that doing so set certain expectations in the congregation and informed our planning. Consequently, we would not be able to proceed with full membership until Bucer's Fall 2026 meeting. Pastor Ray replied saying, "Your schedule makes sense as you need to bring the congregation along with the Session, especially important considering all the changes you all have been through the past couple of years. No rush on our part."

In the meantime, Pastor Ray is reviewing our bylaws to make sure they are in accord with CREC confessional and theological standards. Session also continues to review the CREC Constitution, Book of Memorials and Book of Procedures.

#### **WHERE WE'RE GOING**

As we draw near to this important decision, I want to lay out for you the process moving forward. Session will continue to evaluate the CREC, its constitutional documents and its culture. In May, Pastors Peter, Kyle and I will host a five week ACE class in the Social Room to discuss the CREC, explain why we think it is a good choice and help answer your questions about the denomination. Over the summer we will host a weekly "brown bag" lunch gathering for conversation about the CREC.

At our Annual Meeting this September we will review our bylaws and vote to ratify them with any necessary revisions. Assuming all goes well, the Session will also likely present a motion regarding affiliation with the CREC in accord with our bylaws, Article 1.7, which states, "The Church has the right to seek to affiliate or disaffiliate from a denomination or group of churches through a simple majority vote of the congregation."

# ON PRINCIPLE

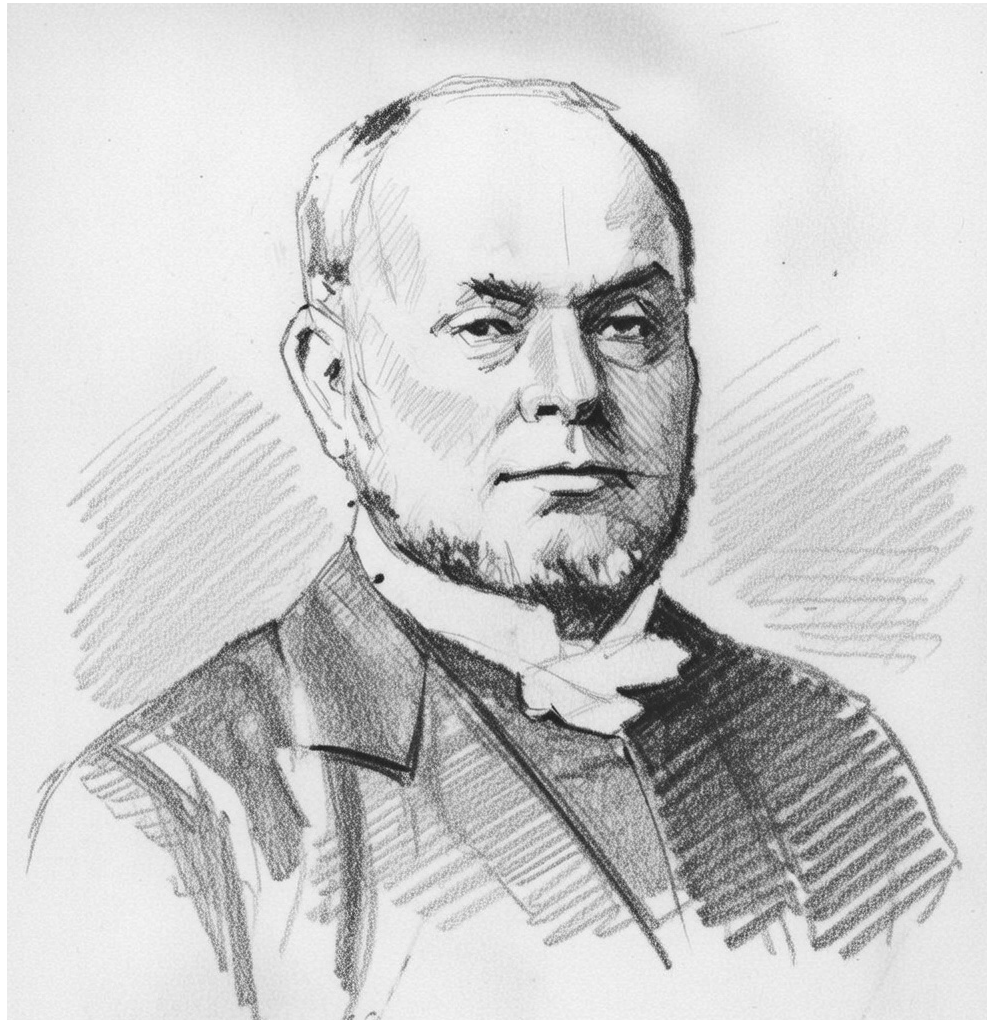
By Nate Devlin, Senior Pastor

**T**homas Witherow (1824-1890) was an Irish Presbyterian minister and historian who taught at the Royal University of Ireland. One of his great theological contributions was a biblical evaluation of denominations. He wanted to know what the Bible said about denominations, their forms of government and whether or not participation in a denomination was a biblical principle. He shared his thoughts in a book entitled *The Apostolic Church: Which is it?*

What's great about the book is just how principled Witherow is. When it comes to joining a denomination or not he writes:

*Most people who withdraw from the communion of one Church to connect themselves with another, and thus exercise their right of choice between the various forms of ecclesiastical government, are induced to give their preference from motives such as should never influence an intelligent Christian. They are guided by feeling rather than by judgment. They do not first ascertain the leading principles of the denomination from its acknowledged standards, and then examine these principles in the light of the Word of God.*

*They are guided by feeling rather than by judgment. They do not first ascertain the leading principles [...] and then examine these principles in the light of the Word of God.*



**THOMAS WITHEROW (1824 - 1890)**

Witherow spends the remainder of the book examining the biblical principles that inform a Christian's choice of local church or denomination. What are the principles?

### **THE PRINCIPLE OF ECCLESIA**

Witherow begins by noting that in Scripture, the word "church" always means an "assembly of the people of God—a society of Christians." Such an assembly is called an ecclesia (literally: "called out ones"). Originally, ecclesia was a civic term, but was adopted by the Apostles (Col. 4:15; Acts 7:38, 11:22; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 5:25) because the church is a political entity by virtue of being part of the Kingdom of God. As a society within the kingdom, the church requires organization and order.

## THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

*Which is it?*



**THOMAS WITHEROW**

*Our conclusion is, that, while the prelacy of Rome and England is in direct opposition to the form of ecclesiastical government that was sanctioned by inspired men; and while Independency approaches much more nearly, it still falls short of the primitive model, the Presbyterian is, in point of government, the only Apostolic Church.*

### THE PRINCIPLE OF ORDER

As a society, the church must be organized (Titus 1:5). Witherow notes that the church has historically organized itself in three ways, through Prelacy, Independency and Presbytery. According to Witherow:

- **Prelacy** is that form of Church Government which is administered by archbishops, bishops, deans, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical office-bearers depending on that hierarchy; and is such as we see exemplified in the Greek Church, the Church of Rome, and the Church of England.
- **Independency** is that form of Church Government whose distinctive principle is, that each separate congregation is under Christ subject to no external jurisdiction whatever, but has within itself—in its office-bearers and members—all the materials of government; and is such as is at present in practical operation among Congregationalists and Baptists.
- **Presbytery** is that form of Church Government which is dispensed by presbyters or elders, met in Session, Presbytery, Synod, or General Assembly; and is such as is presented in the several Presbyterian Churches of Ireland, Scotland, England, and America.

Now, according to Witherow, the question remains, which of these three forms of government is most consistent with the Apostles' teaching?

### SIX BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

Witherow identifies six biblical principles within the Apostolic church that help clarify which form of government is most consistent with Scripture. Witherow spends several pages engaging the Bible

in order to derive his principles from Scripture. Space does not allow a full review of his exegesis, but having read the book, I can confirm that each principle is indeed biblically established. He summarizes the principles in this way:

1. *The office-bearers were chosen by the people. (Acts 1:13-26, 6:5-6)*
2. *The office of bishop and elder was identical. (Acts 20:17-28)*
3. *There was a plurality of elders in each Church. (Acts 14:23, 20:17)*
4. *Ordination was the act of a presbytery—that is, of a plurality of elders. (Acts 6:6, 13:1-3; 1 Tim. 4:14, 5:22)*
5. *There was the privilege of appeal to the assembly of elders [presbytery]; and the power of government was exercised by them in their associate capacity. (Acts 15:2, 6, 12, 16:4)*
6. *The only Head of the Church was the Lord Jesus Christ. (Eph. 1:20-23, 5:23; Col. 1:18)*

Witherow then evaluates the three forms of government based on these principles and concludes:

*The modern Church which embodies in its government most apostolic principles, comes nearest in its government to the Apostolic Church. We apply this axiom to the settlement of the case. Our conclusion is, that, while the prelacy of Rome and England is in direct opposition to the form of ecclesiastical government that was sanctioned by inspired men; and while Independency approaches much more nearly, it still falls short of the primitive model, the Presbyterian is, in point of government, the only Apostolic Church.*

I would encourage the reader to examine

Witherow to see if he indeed makes his case. The book is short and accessible. I realize it is a bold claim, but I for one am persuaded by his argument. And so, if we want to be obedient to Scripture and faithful to our tradition, then we really do have to consider joining a presbytery.

### THE CONFESSIONAL PRINCIPLE

There is one final principle that we as a congregation must also consider. Our bylaws state that:

*We recognize the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms as our confessional statement of orthodox Presbyterianism and adopt them as our sole subordinate standard of doctrine as found in Scripture. Officers of this congregation must declare their honest subscription to this system of doctrine.*

The congregation has agreed to adopt and follow the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Session must subscribe. Chapter 31:1 of the Confession states:

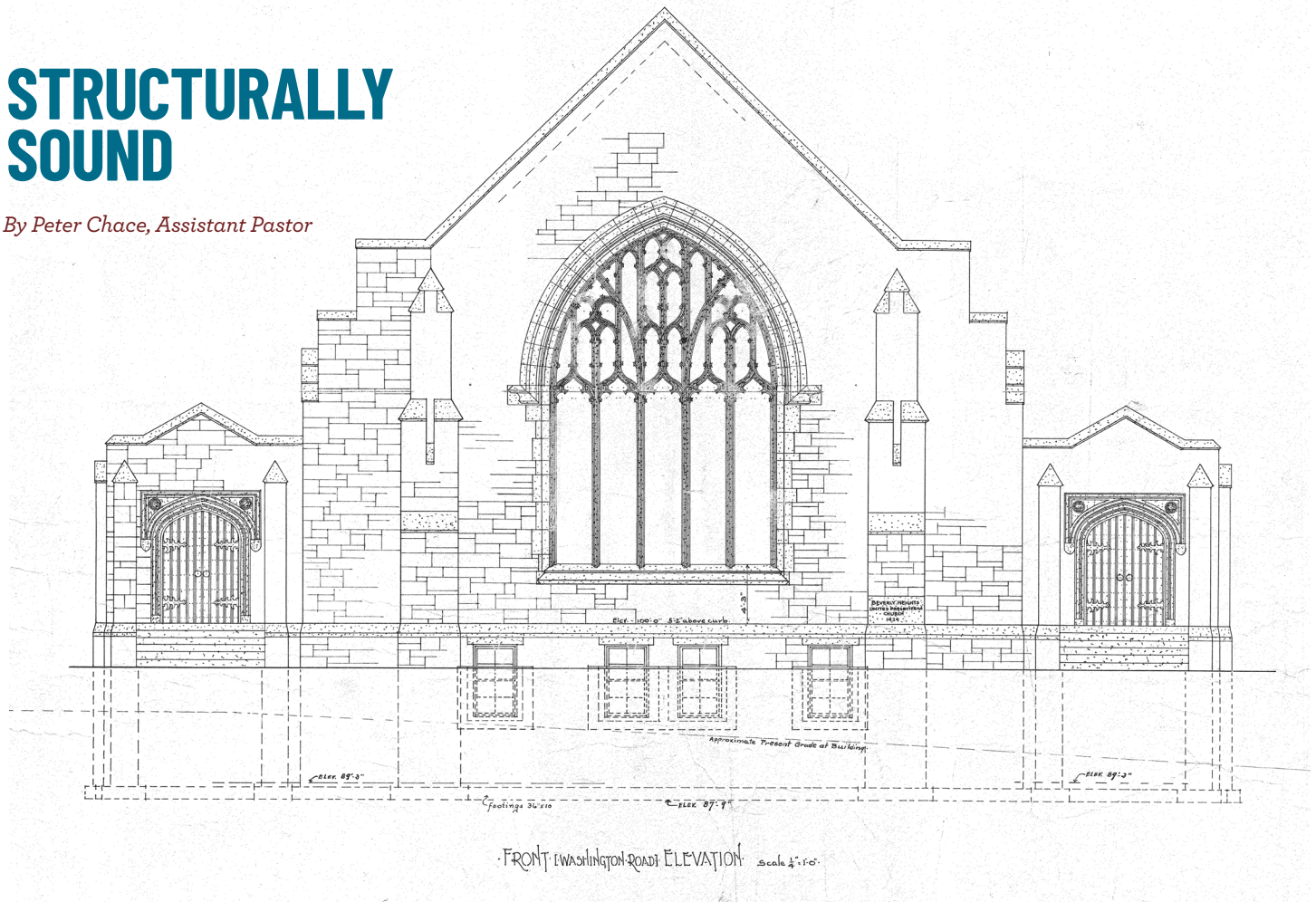
*For the better government and further edification of the Church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods or Councils [i.e. Presbyteries].*

Westminster bases this statement on the same Scripture Witherow appeals to (Acts 15:2, 4, 6). What this means is that if we are to remain faithful to our confessional standard, then we must work to be a part of a presbytery.

Joining a presbytery is both a biblical and confessional principle. The issue before us then, is one of obedience. Will we remain obedient to Scripture and our confession or not? Whatever we decide to do, at the very least it should be principled.

# STRUCTURALLY SOUND

By Peter Chace, Assistant Pastor



I have had quite a denominational journey thus far in life. I was baptized in the Episcopal church when I was an infant, confirmed in the United Methodist church when I was in early middle school, gave my life to Christ in the Baptist church when I was a teenager, served as a Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church (USA) right out of college, served as the Director of Next Generation Ministry when we were an Evangelical Presbyterian (EPC) congregation, and earned my Master of Divinity from Trinity Anglican Seminary. Today, at 38 years old, I am ordained as a pastor here at Beverly Heights Presbyterian Church while we are currently independent.

Each of these traditions holds a different view of the Christian faith and church governance. I have often pondered the question “what *is* the right way to run the church?”

In one sense, Jesus Himself runs the Church because He is the head of the Church (Col 1:18; Eph 5:23) and He is our

King (Ps 103:19; 1 Cor 15:24-26). In another sense, Jesus hands that authority over to us (Matt 16:19; Matt 28:18-20; Eph 2:20-22). This is the difference between what earlier theologians called Christ’s *essential* kingdom and His *mediatorial* kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

Christ rules *essentially*—directly—His invisible Church which “consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all.”<sup>2</sup>

Christ rules *mediatorially*—through us—His visible Church which “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion; and of their children: and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.”<sup>3</sup>

1 Guy Waters, *How Jesus Runs the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2011), 32-33.

2 Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 25.1.

3 WCF 25.2.

In other words, Christ runs the Church *and* we run His Church. While there are certain principles that are laid out clearly in Scripture (see Pastor Nate’s article *On Principle*) there are also decisions that are left entirely up to the wisdom of God’s people.

For Beverly Heights, the presbyterian form of government is a settled conviction. Not only were we founded as a presbyterian church nearly 100 years ago, but our continued reading of Scripture and study of the apostolic church confirms this conviction (see Pastor Nate’s other article). Thus I do not believe remaining independent for a long period of time is a good option. This leaves us with the question: *which* denomination do we want to join?

I have wrestled and thought hard about this question. I believe the best option for Beverly Heights is the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC). Here’s why:

*Whenever a church body consigns its work to bureaucrats, it is possible for that body to act wrongly, and yet leave itself without any capacity to hold any individuals to be personally responsible for that wrong. Not so with CREC governance.*

**The Bible comes first.** The CREC constitution states that “our expectation is that all our churches will routinely teach and preach the whole counsel of God as expressed in Scripture (Acts 20:27; Matt. 4:4), and in all matters of doctrinal discussion and debate, an appeal to *Scripture will always be the first resort.*”<sup>4</sup> See my other article, *Putting the Bible First*, for a full explanation of this point. In short, I believe this is *the* most important reason to consider the CREC as a denomination.

**The CREC emphasizes local church governance over centralized bureaucracy.** “We hold the local congregation has primacy in the structure of biblical church government (Heb. 13:7, 17) without denying the important blessings and obligations which come from broader connections and fellowship.”<sup>5</sup>

**Pastors are members of their local church, not the presbytery.** “Within the CREC each elder and pastor must be a member of the church in which he serves.”<sup>6</sup> Of the dozens of presbyterian denominations out there, almost all other presbyterian bodies require pastors to be members of their local presbytery instead of their congregation.

**Each congregation must have its own constitution.** “Before a congregation can be accepted into CREC membership it must have its own constitution.”<sup>7</sup> While the CREC does have a constitution to govern its affairs at the presbytery and national levels, insisting that congregations have their own constitutions ensures local priority.

**The CREC emphasizes personal responsibility.** One CREC authority

writes that “whenever a church body consigns its work to bureaucrats, it is possible for that body to act wrongly, and yet leave itself without any capacity to hold any individuals to be personally responsible for that wrong [...] Not so with CREC governance.”<sup>8</sup> Amen! We have lived through that bureaucratic lack of responsibility, let us not consign ourselves to it again.

**The CREC does not allow for standing committees of any kind.** This cuts down significantly on bureaucratic overreach. The constitution states that assemblies may “form no standing committees or boards. Every committee must be ad hoc and automatically dissolve when it completes its assigned task, or submits its assigned report to the assembly.”<sup>9</sup>

**All property is unequivocally owned by the local church.**<sup>10</sup>

**Local church decisions are final.** “Except in the case of referrals, appeals, or complaints authorized and accepted under this section, all local church decisions are final and may not be reviewed by the broader assemblies (Presbytery or Council). Nothing in this section prevents local churches from seeking, or the broader assemblies from offering, informal counsel and advice. To the contrary, it is strongly encouraged as the best way of avoiding needless appeals and referrals.”<sup>11</sup>

**The presbytery is spiritually authoritative and provides accountability for the local session, but cannot force a church out of their property or leaders.** “The decisions of the assemblies with regard to the local congregation are spiritually authoritative. If the elders of a particular congregation

choose to refuse the instruction of the broader church, the congregation may do so without deprivation of property. However, if their disregard of godly counsel is particularly egregious, the congregation may be removed from membership in the CREC, in accordance with constitutional procedure.”<sup>12</sup> **Simply put, the situation we had in the EPC which led to our membership and property dispute can not happen within the CREC.**

**The CREC balances historical presbyterianism and local church control.** “The nature of our affiliation is one of confederation, that is, we have formed a broad connection between churches which, with respect to polity, is representative, being neither hierarchical nor autonomous.”<sup>13</sup>

Christ is the head of His Church. Christ is the head of Beverly Heights. We are His Body, here in Mt. Lebanon. When I think about the affiliation that will allow us to continue growing, both in our faithfulness to Christ and in our capacity for ministry, the CREC stands out as a faithful expression of presbyterian principles tempered by a deep respect for the local church's God-given authority. The CREC constitution safeguards the very convictions that have shaped Beverly Heights over the past century: Scripture first, local emphasis on leadership and decisions, and a presbyterian structure that fosters genuine accountability without bureaucratic entanglement or coercion.

Independence is a bridge, not a destination. We want to step forward into a broader fellowship where churches can remain distinct, while enjoying the mutual encouragement, counsel, and spiritual oversight that Scripture commands.

4 CREC Constitution, Article I. A., *emphasis added*.

5 CREC Constitution, Article III. A.

6 CREC Constitution, Article II. B.

7 CREC Constitution, Article III. E. 1. a.

8 Christopher Schlect, *Principles of CREC Polity*, 2026

9 CREC Constitution, Article IV. A. 4.

10 CREC Constitution, Article IV. A. 3.

11 CREC Constitution, Article IV. D. 2.

12 CREC Constitution, Article IV. D. 6.

13 CREC Constitution, Preamble

# PUTTING THE BIBLE FIRST

By Peter Chace, Assistant Pastor

One of the hallmarks of the Protestant Reformation was the cry *ad fontes*, which means “to the fountainhead” or “return to the sources!” The Reformers wanted to return to the original texts of Scripture, the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts, to better understand God’s Word. They wanted to put the Bible first, but in order to put the Bible first, they first had to go back to the Bible.

From what I can tell, Beverly Heights has never been confused about our primary source of authority. God’s Word has always been the stated norm and rallying cry of Protestant and Reformed churches like ours. But as in the time of the Reformation, it is not enough to merely state the intent, we must live it out. To state the obvious, in order to live out God’s Word, we *actually have to know what it says*.

Consider this phrase from the EPC Constitution, “all Scripture is self-attesting and being Truth, requires our unreserved submission in all areas of life [...] The Bible, uniquely and fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the supreme and final authority on all matters on which it speaks.”<sup>1</sup> I, of course, agree with every word of this. But a constitution is only as good as the people living it out, writing it down does not mean it is automatically lived out.

As I read the CREC’s constitution for the first time, the first paragraph of the first article caught my attention. It’s a bit long, but I want you to read the whole thing because I believe it’s worth it:

*The Scriptures are always the ultimate and inerrant court of appeal (Ps. 18:30; 119:89; Matt. 4:4; John 16:12-15; Rom.*

*3:1-2; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). Because this is a constitutional document, a certain emphasis must be placed on creeds and confessions in what follows (Acts 15:1-31; 16:4-5; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; John 1:14; 1 John 4:2-3; 2 John 7). However, in no way is it our intention to set such confessions of faith above or alongside the Scriptures. Our expectation is that all our churches will routinely teach and preach the whole counsel of God as expressed in Scripture (Acts 20:27; Matt. 4:4), and in all matters of doctrinal discussion and debate, an appeal to Scripture will always be the first resort. In accordance with our creedal and confessional standards, we acknowledge the pre-eminence of Scripture.<sup>2</sup>*

The difference between Scripture being the “final authority” and Scripture being “the first resort” strikes me immediately. Now, again, constitutions are only as good as the people who live them out, but the process by which a phrase like this makes it into a constitution in the first place communicates something significant. Lived experience.

<sup>2</sup> CREC Constitution, Article I. A., **emphasis added**

The CREC expects what I expect; that our church “will routinely teach and preach the whole counsel of God as expressed in Scripture (Acts 20:27; Matt. 4:4), and in all matters of doctrinal discussion and debate, an appeal to Scripture will always be the first resort.” This reveals a way of thinking and living into Christian faith that is the same as ours here at Beverly Heights.

This position assumes that we will have robust discussions and debates, and that Scripture is where we go first. This position assumes that there will be competing good authorities, such as church history, personal life experience, and experts of various fields, and still Scripture is where we go first.

The world that we inhabit is filled with flesh and blood people who have honest discussions, robust debates, and make consequential decisions about families, jobs, worship, politics, investments, entertainment, and everything else under the sun. And Scripture is where we go first for all of it.

“Jesus is LORD” is the oldest Christian creed. Lord of what? Everything. Why? Because Scripture declares it.



<sup>1</sup> EPC Constitution, *Essentials of Our Faith*

*The Scriptures are always the ultimate and inerrant court of appeal (Ps. 18:30; 119:89; Matt. 4:4; John 16:12–15; Rom. 3:1–2; 1 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 1:20–21) [...] Our expectation is that all our churches will routinely teach and preach the whole counsel of God as expressed in Scripture (Acts 20:27; Matt. 4:4), and in all matters of doctrinal discussion and debate, an appeal to Scripture will always be the first resort.*

“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps 24:1).

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:16–17).

“So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:10–11).

I could go on, but you get the point. As we consider where we want to be as a church denominationally, I humbly suggest the following: we don’t want to buy into a brand, we don’t want to buy into an ethos,

we don’t want to buy into a constitution, we don’t want to buy into respectability, or any other secondary good— we want to put Scripture first. From what I can see, that’s what the CREC does best: it puts everything under the Lordship of Christ, and under the authority of the Word of God. What do you think?

## **Andy Lucas, Ruling Elder**

*The issue of whether or not to join the CREC should distill to one question: what choice moves us as a church and as individuals forward in our pursuit of becoming the spotless Bride of Christ? Reading Paul’s writings (particularly in Ephesians 4 but certainly elsewhere) and reciting the Apostle’s Creed plainly demonstrate that this is not best done in independence. The Bride of Christ does not exist solely at 1207 Washington Road, and so we should be bound by covenant to the Church catholic.*

*Having established this, the question then turns to which denomination is best to join? Over the last three years, I have spent countless hours listening to sermons from CREC pastors and reading content from their members, and I have visited a CREC church with my family. This is a communion of churches that holds “as first importance” the supremacy of Scripture as the authority for all of life and actively resists the pull of our current culture toward compromise. Above all, the CREC believes that churches and their members must obey God rather than man. This is a communion Beverly Heights should join. This communion will help us to become more like Christ.*

# LET'S NOT CANCEL THE CREC A SECOND TIME

By Tom O'Boyle, Ruling Elder

**T**hree years ago this May, I had the great fortune of meeting for the first and only time a theologian by the name of Peter Leithart.

Back at that time, we'd begun an initiative at our church to invite eminent theologians to come and speak at annual gatherings which we called the Beverly Heights "Symposium." You may recall these events. I surely do, fondly. At least two of them.

The first two lectures in 2021 (Dr. Carl Trueman) and 2022 (Dr. David VanDrunen) were a success. Hundreds of people—from our church and beyond—attended. There would never be a third.

Our guest for the third was supposed to have been Dr. Leithart. A highly respected theologian, I was thrilled when he accepted our invitation to speak at the third Symposium.

And I was no less impressed when a group of us met him in person during a trip to Birmingham, Alabama, to attend a two-day seminar of his. Not only was his knowledge of Scripture and adherence to Westminster unparalleled, we all were universally impressed with him as a person.

Which was why I was shocked—and that's putting it mildly—when, upon our return from Birmingham, I suddenly discovered that our developing relationship with Dr. Leithart was seen as anything other than what it rightly was. Instead of the highly respected, genial man we'd met, adversaries in our midst were whispering he was, of all things, a heretic. Calling Dr. Leithart a Martian would have been more plausible.



It was my first direct encounter with a practice common back in these United States during the Biden era, what would become known as "cancel culture" in wider society. Yet even though there's a new sheriff in town, cancel culture lives on. Cancel culture thrives among Christians when "toxic empathy" thrives.

I was recently introduced to that phrase in a Free Press article written by Allie Beth Stuckey, whose 2024 bestseller of the same name unpacks the phenomenon.

A popular Christian conservative podcaster, here is Stuckey's definition of toxic empathy: "Empathy means to feel how someone else feels. It's not always toxic. But it can become toxic when you are so deeply mirroring another person's feelings that you make decisions based on those feelings, rather than on what is objectively true and moral and just."

Joe Rigney, a CREC pastor who met with our Session during this tumult, wrote a book about this phenomenon titled *Leadership and the Sin of Empathy*.

Epitomizing this empathetic mind virus is this recent New York Times headline: "The economy is a feeling." Which no doubt will come as a shock to economists. I too

was shocked. All those years I labored as a business reporter at the Wall Street Journal delivering hard economic data to readers, thinking their judgments were based on facts and reality. Silly me!

Looking back on what happened in the cancellation of Dr. Leithart—and, by extension, the denomination he was affiliated with and had helped shape, the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC)—the people in our midst who were seeking to cancel Dr. Leithart were PhD level practitioners of toxic empathy. While their allegations were devoid of objective truth, they were quite skilled at leveling claims based solely on their feelings, which they purported were true, moral and just.

And much to my amazement at that time back in 2023, the people advancing their false narratives found a rapt audience among the five Commissioners on the Administrative Commission who were then sitting in judgment of Pastor Nate—and us, for having the audacity to stand with him and against them.

Perhaps their most ridiculous demand was directed at our new relationship with Dr. Leithart: "Teaching Elder Devlin is to immediately suspend

association or communication with the Theopolis Institute and Peter Leithart while [a committee] inquires into their theological alignment or mis-alignment with the Essential Tenets of the EPC and the Westminster Confession,” the Commissioners wrote in September 2023.

That inquiry later concluded the allegations against Dr. Leithart were entirely unfounded, but the damage was done. The third Symposium was never held. It had been cancelled.

Which brings me to what I learned from this great tutorial on the folly of men (and some women, too).

I decided then that the last religious organization I wanted affiliation with on planet Earth was the Evangelical Presbyterian Church which had orchestrated this terrible injustice, and

from which we secured our independence one year ago, after much additional tribulation.

The Commissioners were quite skilled at cancellation, but utterly incapable of separating fact from fiction. I have since concluded that toxic empathy was largely the root cause of their self-delusion.

Since that time, I’ve had lengthy conversations with several representatives of the CREC (though not Doug Wilson, the person most often subjected to similar Leithart-style cancellation). Regarding Wilson, I am equally suspect of the accusations often hurled at him, as I’ve seen this movie before.

Nothing I have learned since about the CREC or its representatives has altered my initial opinion of them one iota. They are who we thought they were then.

That is, men of God who unfailingly and unflinchingly adhere to Scripture.

While holding fast to Scripture is no longer popular among evangelicals, the CREC strikes me as the best option before us. It is the best way to keep toxic empathy at bay—and a far, far better place to be than any other Reformed denomination with which I am acquainted.

*They are who we thought they were then. That is, men of God who unfailingly and unflinchingly adhere to Scripture.*

## Art Flickinger, Ruling Elder

*“We live in a disoriented and rootless age,” wrote British historian, Eric Hobsbawm, in his four volume, History of the Modern World (1789-1991). He describes the disintegration of the old patterns of social relationships and with it the snipping off of the links between generations. The West is losing its identity as to who we were and why are we here. This certainly applies today to the church in America.*

*Here at Beverly Heights we go back to our Christian roots by singing Psalms, reciting aloud the creeds of our faith, preaching the full counsel of the Word of God and worshipping with a liturgy that connects us to Christians throughout the ages. We know who we are and why we are here. Joining the CREC is a perfect fit for Beverly Heights as they are a reformed, conservative presbyterian denomination with values and a worship liturgy that is practically identical to ours. CREC does not have full-time bureaucrats that run the denomination by committees with no accountability. The structure is decentralized, the local church is the governing authority, and the denomination has no claim on our property or assets.*

# REFORMED AND ALWAYS RENOVATING

By Kyle Bennett, Assistant Pastor

When I survey the wondrous landscape of Reformed denominations, having served as an elder in multiple ones, I am encouraged and motivated by the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches. This is a communion that takes seriously the complete and comprehensive Lordship of Jesus Christ and our part to play.

Whether it's Peter Leithart or Doug Wilson, Joe Rigney or Troy Greene (one of my ordination examiners), these are teachers and pastors who hold to the conviction that the world doesn't belong to Satan. Not now, not ever. And that our Lord and King, Jesus Christ, invites us to "renovate it," as John Calvin eloquently put it.

When King David sang, "The earth is the Lord's and everything that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it" (Psalm 24:1), he wasn't stroking God's ego. He was making a dogmatic statement about what is true about all things—they belong to the Lord. And that this is how we should see them.

Everything that relates to land, earth, the ground, country, countries, and the world is the Lord's. Not just creeping things, wild animals, the fish of the sea, and the birds of the heavens. *Everything* on the face of the earth belongs to the Lord. Every. Single. Thing.

But not just everything that He has made. It includes everything that His creatures have made and will make. If it's somewhere on the face of the earth, it's His. It's His because even the imagination, inspiration, judgment, skills, and tools that were used to make it derive from Him and are sustained by Him.



The beaver's dam. The bee's honey. The ancient doors. The leather wallet. The children, cars, and cameras. All His. Because they originated from Him, are sustained by Him, and used for His glory (Romans 11:36). What is a dam without trees? And a bee without flowers? And a car without space and time?

This is important for thinking about culture-making and cultural engagement. We have to start with the supposition that the earth is the *Lord's* and *everything* in it. There is not one square inch of it that belongs to anyone else—you, me, or Satan. What Caesar is owed is granted by Jesus . . . because He owns it.

We know from Moses that the Lord mandated us to create and make things (Genesis 1:28). Make tools. Paint portraits. Write books. Adorn and decorate rooms. Plan and lead services. Make and sell commodities. Open Christian businesses. Everything we do should embody and express the values and virtues of our God.

But it doesn't end with what we make. We learn from the apostle Paul that all things . . . the *world* . . . are [ours] and [we] are Christ's" (1 Corinthians 3:21). Christ has given us the world (*cosmos*). Not just the stuff we make, but everything that is His. When the time is right, someday, we will judge His angels (1 Corinthians 6:3).

The plot thickens. Jesus commissions His disciples—that's us—to teach every nation to obey His commandments (Matthew 28:20). He doesn't just say, "evangelize them and share the good news of the gospel with them." He tells them to make everyone on planet Earth observe what Jesus commands. *Make* them disciples.

Which means, teach them not to kill. Make them celebrate Christ's death and resurrection on the Sabbath. Teach them to not have any other gods before them. Teach them that they are the Lord's and everything that they have is the Lord's. Get them to recognize the Lord and obey everything He has commanded.

Now, obviously, this doesn't imply violence. We don't physically *force* people to become Christian. But it does mean *making* them disciples and *teaching* them to observe Christ's commandments. And that involves telling them how to live—what to wear, how to speak, who to marry, and what they should be doing on Sundays.

The Creator, Redeemer, and King who makes every knee bow, demon shudder, wind hurl, plant wither, and fish swallow, commissions us to make disciples. But we can't do that if we keep our mouths shut. If we tip-toe around truth claims. If we don't protest. If we don't petition. If we don't break bread, and do it all over again.

Most Christians don't believe that we are here to twiddle our thumbs—to get through life and knock items off the bucket list. Great! But more Christians should realize that we are not here to merely witness to Christ; we are here to *work* for Him. We are here to make disciples and renovate His world, which is now ours.

When you renovate something, you repair and renew it. You take what was already there and you make it new again. And this involves tearing out the old stuff and putting in new materials. But there is a cost to it. It will get dusty. For a time, it will look ugly. You might step on a nail. You won't be able to inhabit it for a while.

This is how a biblical Christian sees the world and the task before us. It's how Abram, Moses, Paul, Peter, and Luke saw things. And John Calvin, Martin Bucer, John Knox, Abraham Kuyper, and Francis Schaeffer. They were "reformed and always renovating" their Lord's world. *Their* world.

In the CREC, you will find like-minded Reformers. Those who believe that our bodies are the Lord's, and act like it. Those who say, "The government is the Lord's sword," and expect its leaders to act like Christians. Those who take Christian education seriously because children are a heritage from the Lord (Psalm 127:3).

### **Bob Barron, Ruling Elder**

*Since Bev and I joined Beverly Heights in 1980, our church has remained committed to the supremacy of God's Word and to historic Reformed theology, including the Westminster Confession of Faith. In my view, the CREC aligns closely with these convictions.*

*I especially value the CREC's emphasis on covenant community, which shapes its understanding of worship, family life, discipline, and cultural engagement. Practices we've adopted at Beverly Heights—such as weekly communion and a thoughtful, historic liturgy—fit naturally within the CREC's framework. I have personally seen the spiritual benefit of these rich traditions in my own life and family.*

*Because our theology and worship already reflect these commitments, I believe Beverly Heights would remain fundamentally the same congregation as part of the CREC.*

*In researching the denomination, I worked to separate accurate information from misrepresentation. After reviewing its constitution and doctrinal standards, I am convinced they are consistent with the Reformed teaching we have long embraced. The CREC affirms God's sovereignty and Christ's Lordship over every sphere of life—convictions I see lived out in our growing covenant community. For these reasons, I am encouraged and grateful that we are considering joining the CREC.*

# TRIPS TO MOSCOW, ID

By Chad Winkler, Ruling Elder

Over the past couple of years I have had the privilege of traveling twice to Moscow, Idaho – first in November 2023 and again in June 2025. Both trips were connected to time spent with churches and leaders within the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC). What began as an opportunity to observe and learn gradually became something more meaningful: a chance to see firsthand what a mature, multi-generational Christian community can look like when churches pursue a clear theological vision over many years.

As our own congregation continues to consider its future and potential denominational relationships, I believe it is important not only to read documents, attend informational classes, or discuss denominational differences, but also to observe living examples. My visits to Moscow, and particularly interactions with Christ Church, Moscow and its leadership, provided that opportunity.

My first trip in November 2023 involved attending Sunday worship services, meeting pastors and church leaders, and spending time with families in the community. Elissa came with me, and the trip allowed us to take a breath, so to speak, from the chaos and the nonsense that the Presbytery of the Alleghenies (EPC) had brought on Beverly Heights Church and her leadership. It was incredibly refreshing, and I think Elissa would echo that sentiment. One of the most immediate impressions was the cheerfulness and joy with which worship was approached. Services were reverent without being stiff, joyful without being casual. Congregational singing was strong and confident (with “spirited” tempi! I loved it.). Children were present, engaged, and overall amazingly disciplined (I saw plenty

*One of the most immediate impressions was the cheerfulness and joy with which worship was approached. Services were reverent without being stiff, joyful without being casual.*

of dads with wooden spoons in their back pockets. Again, I loved it!). The preaching was substantive and unapologetically biblical—in fact, I heard Pastor Toby Sumpter preach a sermon I will never forget.

There was also an unmistakable sense of covenantal identity. The two churches I attended, Christ Church and King’s Cross, did not function merely as gatherings of individuals with similar preferences, but as covenant communities consciously bound together under Christ’s authority and shared commitments. That mindset influences everything – membership

expectations, attitudes toward work, discipleship, education, and family life. It produces stability because people understand both what they believe and what they are building together. In a word, it was inspiring.

Equally striking was the generational perspective. Families were often large and visibly integrated into church life. The overall impression was not of ancillary programs being maintained, but of a culture being cultivated – intentionally and patiently.

Those observations were encouraging, but my second trip in June 2025 added an entirely new dimension.

That visit came through an invitation to participate musically with Christ Church’s community orchestra, directed by Mark Reagan, Music Director at Christ Church. I was invited to perform a trumpet solo with the orchestra, and I also played first trumpet in the orchestra for a performance of a complete Handel oratorio presented with the church choir.

The musical experience itself was deeply meaningful. The choir, made up of church members, and the orchestra performed at a very high level. But what impacted me even more was what the event represented culturally.



CHAD AND HUDSON VISITING WITH CHURCH LEADERS FROM CHRIST CHURCH, MOSCOW, ID

*As our congregation continues to move forward, including our trajectory toward the CREC, these experiences have given me confidence that we are moving in a healthy direction. The CREC is not merely a denominational structure, but a network of churches seeking to live out historic Reformed Christianity through intentional community, strong families, robust worship, Christian education, and cultural engagement under Christ's lordship. Its posture is shaped not by trends or emotions, but by a commitment to obey Scripture and build faithfully over time.*

There were at least 500 to 600 people in attendance – including many families with young children (who were remarkably attentive listeners) and a significant presence of church leadership. What I participated in was not merely a concert, but the fruit of years of leadership cultivating an appreciation for beauty, excellence, and the arts within the life of the church.

It was revealing to see how a congregation can develop a love for great music when pastors and leaders present, model, and encourage that value. Classical music was not treated as elitist or peripheral, but as something belonging naturally within Christian culture. That integration of faith and the arts was both encouraging and instructive.

On a personal level, the trip was also memorable because my son Hudson was able to come with me. We were generously hosted by Mark and his wife Corinne and their four children during our stay. Their hospitality was extraordinary. Living in their home for several days provided a window into everyday family life within the Christ Church community – not staged or formal, but normal and warm. For Hudson especially, it was valuable to see another household where faith, education, music, and family life were integrated naturally. Hudson is a student at Logos Online, which is based in Moscow, so he also had the opportunity to meet his Geometry teacher in person.

Experiences like these communicate more than any presentation or document ever could. They show what long-term faithfulness can produce.

Another important aspect of the June visit was extended conversations with Mark, not just about music but about how things are run at Christ Church. Our discussions were practical rather than theoretical – addressing church governance, Psalm singing, leadership development, and the realities of shepherding congregations over many years. I was struck by both his humility and his confidence that pursuing biblical principles consistently over time bears fruit. No claims of perfection – just steady obedience.

For me personally, these trips were very encouraging as someone serving in church leadership at Beverly Heights. Ministry often involves responding to immediate needs and challenges, and it can sometimes be difficult to see long-term outcomes. Observing churches that have pursued a coherent vision patiently over many years provides perspective and hope.

It is important to emphasize that Moscow is not a template to copy. Their context is different from ours, just as Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania are different from Idaho. Every congregation exists within its own calling. However, the “Moscow Mood” is a helpful example of what can develop when churches share theological clarity from leadership, covenantal commitment,

unity and decisiveness among the body in terms of direction, and long-term vision.

As our congregation continues to move forward, including our trajectory toward the CREC, these experiences have given me confidence that we are moving in a healthy direction. The CREC is not merely a denominational structure, but a network of churches seeking to live out historic Reformed Christianity through intentional community, strong families, robust worship, Christian education, and cultural engagement under Christ's lordship. Its posture is shaped not by trends or emotions, but by a commitment to obey Scripture and build faithfully over time.

Ultimately, what I witnessed in Moscow was not about a location. It was about faithfulness – ordinary obedience practiced consistently over generations. Seeing that reality firsthand was both encouraging and challenging.

I returned from both trips grateful: for the hospitality, for the fellowship, for the music, and for the opportunity to see what God has been doing through His people in another place.

Most of all, I returned with renewed confidence that Christ is building His Church, and that long-term faithfulness to Scripture, covenant community, and godly leadership truly does bear fruit. That is a lesson worth bringing home—and worth building toward.

# IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Your Session believes in reading as much original source material as possible. When learning about the CREC, it is especially helpful to read their own words. Below is the preamble of the CREC Constitution. We believe it is worth your time and that it speaks for itself. Enjoy.

## PREAMBLE

The name of this confederation of churches is the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC). We use the word Communion in its common sense of being participants in one particular body gathered within the broader body, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As a Communion, we recognize the ordination of all the ministers of our churches. Additionally, we recognize the baptisms of all the members of our churches, and we receive at the Lord's Table all communicant members of our churches. By Reformed, we testify that we stand in the stream of historic Protestant orthodoxy and call to mind the importance of continual reformation and sanctification for the Church of Jesus Christ in light of Holy Scripture, which is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. By Evangelical, we confess that the Gospel of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation, and the Church's calling is to proclaim it with love and doctrinal integrity. The nature of our affiliation is one of confederation, that is, we have formed a broad connection between churches which, with respect to polity, is representative, being neither hierarchical nor autonomous. Our gathering of churches is not intended as a separation from other orthodox believers who confess the name of Christ, but rather as a gathering within that broader church, in order to work together effectively for reformation.

*Consequently, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we charge you, the generations who will follow us in this confederation, to submit to the Scriptures with sincere and honest hearts, and to the standards of this confederation as consistent with the teaching of Scripture. When a portion of our order and confession is found to be out of conformity to Scripture, we charge you to amend it honestly, openly, and constitutionally, as men who must give an account to the God who searches the hearts of men.*

With patterns of church order and confessional standards, one of the fundamental requirements of Scripture is honesty (Ex 20:16). Consequently, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we charge you, the generations who will follow us in this confederation, to submit to the Scriptures with sincere and honest hearts, and to the standards of this confederation as consistent with the teaching of Scripture. When a portion of our order and confession is found to be out of conformity to Scripture, we charge you to amend it honestly, openly, and constitutionally, as men who must give an account to the God who searches the hearts of men. We charge you in the name of the Lord to abhor all forms of ignoring our intentions in what we have set down through dissembling, reinterpretation, dishonesty, relativism, pretended explanations, presumed spiritual maturity, assumed scholarly sophistication, compromise with any forms of sexual and gender-related activism, or outright lying, so that the living God will not strike you and your children with a curse. We charge you to serve Him in all diligence and honesty, so that the blessings of the covenant may extend to your children for a thousand generations.



Our desire is to acknowledge, preserve and manifest unity, preserve purity, and advance Christ's kingdom in an orderly and reasonable way, resulting in mutual edification, accountability, and spiritual discipline. Membership in this confederation is in no way meant to exclude warm relations with other faithful Christian bodies. We therefore welcome and encourage any relations with likeminded churches, presbyteries and denominations that are consistent with this Constitution.