

CHURCH ORDER

Reformed Evangelical Church of Australia

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CHURCH ORDER

Reformed Evangelical Church of Australia /

Introduction

From the beginning of the world to the end, Christ our Lord gathers, protects and maintains a church for Himself through His Spirit and Word in the unity of true faith. Through Him we are given life and are living members of this church for ever.

Due to the strong need for a Reformed Afrikaans ministry amongst Afrikaans speaking immigrants in Australia, the denomination was founded in 2009.

1.0 THE CHURCH AS DENOMINATION

The name of the church:

Reformed Evangelical Church of Australia
(Hereafter called the Church)

The Church is autonomous and operates independently of any other church.

1.1 Confessional basis

The Church is founded on the Bible as the holy and infallible Word of God.

The teachings, which the Church confesses in accordance with the Word of God, are expressed in the Forms of Unity (as determined by the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618-1619, being the thirty-seven articles of the Dutch Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the five doctrines of Dordt) and the Westminster Confession.

The Church endorsed the following Terms and Creeds:

Apostles' Confession of Faith (12 articles)

Creed of Nicea

Creed of Athanasius

1.2 Membership

In His great love the Triune God in Jesus brings people together in His church. People who have their entire salvation in Him, washed in His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit and who accepted Him as their only Saviour. Here they are together and united with heart and will in the same and only spirit on the basis of their faith.

On this basis, a member is a person who officially accepts the confessional basis of the Church and commits him/herself to a congregation of the Church, as well as the children of members of the congregation.

A professing member is a self-confessed member who is recognized by the Church Council as someone who:

- a. was baptised with water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit by a minister,
- b. confesses their faith in the Triune God in public
- c. who requested to practise their discipleship as part of the church.

People become members of a congregation by one of the following:

- a. Baptized members, by birth through the administering of the Holy Baptism in the church;
- b. After completing faith education, baptized members are allowed to become professing members of a congregation after a public confession of faith in a church service;
- c. By transfer of membership from a Reformed Church to this church;
- d. By the Church Council accepting persons from non-Reformed Churches as members after a discussion on the confessional basis of the particular church;
- e. The policy of dual membership applies in exceptional circumstances where members would like to retain membership from a previous church.

Congregations might have the custom whereby persons who join in the congregation, become members of the Church and are welcomed during a signing up opportunity during a church service. At such an event a Commitment (Appendix 1) is signed at the service. As a result of this commitment members seek ways to assist and encourage one another in faith.

1.3 Governance

The church government is based on the Presbyterian Synod church governance system.

1.4 Relations with other Churches

On interdenominational level the Church strives to develop healthy relationships and mutual respect for other churches and church organizations so that unity in the Church of Jesus Christ can be promoted.

2.0 THE CHURCH AS CONGREGATION

2.1 Definition

A church consists of those members in a particular area who come together for worship.

2.2 The founding of new congregations

New churches can be established or seceded from existing congregations when the ministry of the members might be done more effectively in a separate congregation. With secession, the church will put forward a proposal to secede and, if applicable, the church council will submit the distribution of the original church members, assets

and liabilities between the two new churches at the church members meeting for approval. The new congregation is automatically a member of the Church.

2.3 The forming of new congregations by church planting

When a new congregation is formed by people that do not belong to a current congregation of the church, it is the responsibility of the congregation/organisation involved with the process, to ensure this is done according to the reformed tradition and church law. The Executive Committee of the General Assembly must be approached for guidance in the process.

If no congregation/organisation of the church is involved with such a process, the Executive Committee of the General Assembly may appoint a congregation/organisation to assist the new congregation as guardian. The new congregation must officially accept and endorse the confessional basis and Church Order of the Church. The new congregation must make a formal application to the General Assembly to become part of the Church.

2.4 Incorporation of existing congregations / churches

When an existing congregation of any other church expresses a desire to be incorporated into the Church, the General Assembly can approve the incorporation of the congregation as such or incorporate the individual members thereof with a congregation of the Church if the relevant congregation accepts and endorses the confessional basis and Church Order of the Church.

3.0 PARTICULAR MINISTRY

The church recognizes apart from the general duties of the believer, three special offices to whom Christ entrusted to the work of the Church, being that of preaching elder (pastor/minister), ruling elder and deacon. These three offices are equal, but are distinguished based on contract, job description, work and mission. No one can serve in any of these offices unless he/she has been legally elected or appointed and confirmed. All confirmed members of a congregation are eligible to be elected for these offices. Local church councils may appoint members and employ their duties according to local conditions and practical needs and may appoint additional management and service positions in accordance to need.

3.1 Minister

The minister of the congregation is a minister of the Word and the sacraments. In order to serve as a minister in a congregation one needs:

- a. Adequate training received as approved by the General Assembly.
- b. Testimonials / references of good standing in a previous church.
- c. To endorse the confessional basis of church.
- d. To be legally nominated or appointed by a church members meeting as a minister.

3.1.1 Responsibilities

- a. Preaching the Word and service of prayers;
- b. Leading the worship service;
- c. Administering of the sacraments;
- d. Teaching of, or supervision of teaching the final year young candidates for confession of faith;
- e. Pastoral care of the church;
- f. Together with the elders, supervising dealings of the church;
- g. Handle other duties as set forth in the letter of employment, employment agreement or decisions of the Church Council;
- h. Equipping of the other Church Council members and the church members for ministry.

3.1.2 Ordinance and Installation of Ministers.

Candidates for ordination affirm their role in the church after approval by the General Assembly was obtained.

All applicants for ordination must provide evidence of the ability to fulfil the specific tasks in (3.1) and meet the requirements of the Ordinance Regulations for the Ordination of Ministers. This must be submitted for approval to the Executive Committee of the General Assembly. The Executive Committee must report on each application to the General Assembly at their following meeting.

Ordained ministers who are no longer actively serving in a church or ministry of the Church may retain their status with approval from the General Assembly. This permission must be obtained annually.

The services of visiting ministers are organized by the Church Council according to previous determinations.

3.2 Elder

An elder is a professing member appointed by the congregation and elected to spiritually lead and monitor the purity of the doctrine and the lifestyle of the minister (s) and members of the congregation.

3.2.1 Responsibilities

- a. Supervise the teaching and lifestyle of the preacher (s).
- b. Overseeing and maintaining the order and discipline at worship services and administering of the sacraments.
- c. Overseeing the soundness of the preached doctrine.
- d. Responsible for and actively involved in the spiritual life and welfare of the community/congregation.
- e. Responsible for and actively involved in education of faith.
- f. Responsible for and actively engaged in leading others to Christ, both members already within the church and members of the community
- g. Equipping church members for ministry.

3.2.2 Requirements

To be elected as an elder, the person must:

- a. Be a professing member of the congregation;
- b. Have a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures;
- c. Live an impeccable and exemplary lifestyle according to the doctrine, as described in 1 Timothy 3;
- d. Not be someone who just recently came to faith;
- e. Able to teach others.

The election is done as stipulated in 3.5 below.

3.3 Deacon

A Deacon is a professing member elected by the church to perform services according to the needs of the congregation.

3.3.1 Responsibilities

Providing services in order to enable the minister and elders to focus on the spiritual wellbeing and ministry of the church according to Acts 6:1-7.

3.3.2 Requirements

- a. A deacon must be a professing member of the congregation.
- b. A deacon must be blameless in doctrine and lifestyle, as defined in 1 Timothy 3.
- c. The election is done as stipulated in 3.5 below.

3.4 Election and term of office of elders and deacons

3.4.1 Nomination

When the Church Council or the Executive Committee of the congregation becomes aware of a vacancy for an elder or deacon, the Church Council or Executive Committee may:

- a. set a date for a church members meeting where an election to fill the vacancy will be held;
- b. nominate one or more persons to fill the specific vacancy until church council members can be elected at a church members meeting.

3.4.2 Announcement

The date of the church members meeting and the existence of the vacancy (s) are disclosed on two consecutive Sundays. Congregation members are invited to submit written nominations in order to fill the vacancy (s).

3.4.3 Election

- a. At the church members meeting, both the nominations by the Church Council and the congregation members are submitted. If there is more than one nomination per vacancy, an election by ballot or by show of hands will be held.
- b. All professing members have the right to vote.
- c. The names of the elected Church Council members are announced on two consecutive Sundays for approval by the congregation. If a written objection is received, the Church Council deal with the matter.

3.4.4 Installation

- a. The person elected will be notified in writing.
- b. If no written objection to the elected person is brought forward or an objection is not upheld within two weeks after the election, the person is installed during a church service in the office to which he / she was elected.

3.4.5 Term

The term of office for Church Council members and other ministry leaders are determined by the Church Council.

3.5 Paid Staff

The Church Council

- a. determines the need for staff to implement the Church's activities and an organizational structure is set up to that effect;
- b. creates and changes positions within the organizational structure, drafts the job descriptions and employment contracts and determine the compensation payable to the holders of such positions;
- c. recruits staff and employ them in the relevant positions in accordance with all relevant legislation that applies in Australia.

4.0 MEETINGS HELD WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

4.1 Congregants meeting

4.1.1 Composition

A congregants meeting is compiled as stipulated under the provisions of each congregation's approved constitution. If the congregation holds church services at more than one location, the congregation may decide whether decisions will be made jointly or separately. The principle is that the maximum responsibility will be delegated locally, thus congregants meetings may be held at the separate locations.

A quorum is determined by the constitution.

4.1.2 Procedure

- a. Members may submit in writing issues they want to discuss at the congregants meeting to the secretary or chairman for placement on the agenda.
- b. The Church Council gives at least two weeks' notice of the congregants meeting and its agenda.
- c. The chairman of the meeting is determined by the church's constitution.
- d. The secretary keeps proper minutes of the meeting.

4.1.3 Functions

- a. The employment of ministers and the secession of congregations.
- b. The election of Church Council members.
- c. Discussing issues of importance to the particular congregation or specific location of service.
- d. Approval of the annual budget

4.2 Church Council

4.2.1 Composition

A Church Council consists of the office bearers and leaders of the respective congregations as elected, appointed and confirmed by the Church Order.

The quorum is more than half the members.

4.2.2 Procedure

- a. The Church Council meets as determined by the Church Council.
- b. The Church Council elects the chairman from their ranks. A minister may be elected as chairman. In the chairman's absence, an acting chairperson is elected.
- c. The secretary keeps proper minutes of the meetings of the Church Council.
- d. The Church Council can ask the Executive Committee of the General Assembly to send delegate (s) for a specific purpose in an advisory capacity.

4.2.3 Functions

The Church Council

- a. determines the governance model used in the congregation ;
- b. ensures that worship services are held on a regular basis and that the sacraments are served regularly;
- c. ensures that faith education are being held;
- d. oversees the spiritual care of all members;
- e. ensures the proper management of the congregation's matters ;

- f. manages the finances and assets of the congregation in consultation with the financial committee and treasurer;
- g. manages and initiates where needed actions within the congregation in order to strengthen the community of believers;
- h. handles all domestic affairs of the congregation ;
- i. determines the conditions of service and remuneration of the office bearers and staff members;
- j. may recommend amendments to the Church Order and approve amendments to the Church order as recommended by the General Assembly;
- k. regulates and monitors visiting ministers;
- l. may delegate such powers as deemed necessary to the Executive Committee of the church council.

4.2.4 Executive Committee

4.2.4.1 Composition

- a. The composition of the Executive Committee, when deemed necessary, is determined by the Church Council.
- b. The Church Council may appoint leaders where specialized expertise is required. Those leaders need to be approved and confirmed by the Church Council in the position (s) for a specific period of time as determined by the Church Council.
- c. When deemed necessary, the Executive Committee may co-opt other members of the church for input.

4.2.4.2 Meetings

- a. Urgent matters are dealt with by the Executive Committee as well as matters delegated and ongoing arrangements.
- b. The Executive Committee meets when necessary.
- c. At least three days notice of meetings should be given unless unanimously agreed on a shorter notice period.
- d. The minutes of the meeting are submitted for approval to the next Church Council meeting.
- e. A quorum is more than half the members.

4.2.5 Meetings of elders and/or deacons

- a. The Church Council may arrange for elder and / or deacon meetings when needed.
- b. Guidelines for the functioning and tasks of the elder and deacon meetings are determined by the church council.
- c. Meetings may appoint a chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary as required.

4.2.6 Other committees and task groups

The Church Council may appoint committees or task groups and delegate

powers and responsibilities to such committees and / or task groups. Any member of the church can serve on such a committee.

4.3 Committee for Finances

The Church Council appoints a committee for finances in accordance with the constitution of the congregation.

The Committee for Finances:

- a. Ensures that all financial transactions of the church are properly recorded;
- b. Fully and regularly report to the Church Council regarding the church's finances;
- c. Submits an annual budget to the Church Council for approval;
- d. Submits annual audited or certified statements to the Church Council for approval and present this at the church members meeting;
- e. Ensures that the expenses adheres to the approved budget.

5.0 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

5.1 Composition

- a. The General Assembly consists of two members appointed by each congregation or organization from their own members or staff. When a congregation employs more than one appointed minister, the church or organization may appoint two delegates per minister. This will still apply when there is a vacancy.
- b. The delegates are appointed for a term of one year. A delegate may again be appointed for another term.
- c. The delegates appoint their own chairman, vice-chairman and secretary for the meeting. They will remain in office for one year and may be re-elected at the end of the term.
- d. The election of the new chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary will be held at the end of the last meeting of the term.
- e. The chairman, vice chairman and secretary forms the Executive Committee of the General Assembly. During recess this committee deals with the matters of the General Assembly and hands in a report to the next General Assembly. Additional members may be elected to the Executive Committee when needed.

5.2 Meetings

- a. Any professing member of the Church may attend General Assemblies of the church and participate in discussions, but only delegates may vote;
- b. As a minimum, a meeting of the General Assembly will be held yearly.

5.3 Responsibilities

The General Assembly deals with the following issues:

- a. Policy issues of the Church as a whole.
- b. The confessional basis of the Church.
- c. Ecumenical relations.
- d. Merging and establishing of congregations.

- e. Incorporation of other churches or congregations in the church.
- f. Merging of the church with another church.
- g. Long-term planning.
- h. Training, equipping and ongoing care of ministers of the Church.
- i. Determining of the Formulations for use in the church.
- j. Amendments to the Church Order.
- k. Determine the training and qualification requirements of ministers in accordance with the provisions of Clause 3.1
- l. Investigation, hearing and ruling / final decision on disciplinary measures and concerns brought to the attention of the General Assembly.
- m. Other issues raised by the congregations for consideration.

Over the following cases, the General Assembly has the power of final decision:

- a. Policy issues affecting the Church as a whole.
- b. Ecumenical relations.
- c. Merging and establishing of congregations.
- d. Incorporation of other churches or congregations at the church.
- e. Long-term planning.
- f. Training, equipping and ongoing care of the ministers of the Church.
- g. Determining the training and qualification requirements of ministers in accordance with the provisions of Clause 3.1
- h. The investigation, hearing and ruling / decision of disciplinary measures and concerns brought to the attention of the General Assembly.
- i. Other issues the church submitted for decision.

Decisions on the following issues by the General Assembly needs to be ratified by all the congregations :

- a. The confessional basis of the Church.
- b. Amendment of the Church Order.
- c. Merging of the church with another church.

The principle that the local church is the final authority in local matters is recognized by the General Assembly.

The determinations of the General Assembly should be read in conjunction with the Government approved Constitution of the GEKA/ Reformed Evangelical Church of Australia.

6.0 MAJORITIES WHEN MAKING DECISIONS

More than half the voters present is always required for decision making purposes unless explicitly stated otherwise.

7.0 CHURCH SERVICE

The church service is a meeting of the triune God and His church at a specific place and time determined by the Church Council. God initialises this meeting and reveals Himself to the congregation and the congregation responds appropriately.

7.1 Participation in and leading of the church service

- a. All members are called to participate in the service.
- b. The Church Council of a congregation decides who leads the church service.

7.2 Liturgy

The liturgical sequence and content of the service is determined by the minister in consultation with the Church Council.

7.3 Forms

Forms are used for:

- a. Holy Communion
- b. Baptism
- c. Confession of Faith
- d. Confirmation of office bearers
- e. Marriage
- f. Funeral
- g. Dismissal from and re-admission to the church

7.4 Music and song selection

The minister in consultation with the Church Council, decides which music, instruments, songs and song collections are to be used in church services and other gatherings.

8.0 SACRAMENTS

The Church recognizes the Baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments instituted by Christ.

Water as symbol in the Holy Baptism (Matthew 28:18-20) is a sign of the cleansing of sins and new life in Christ and the incorporation into the body of Christ.

Bread and wine as symbols in the Lord's Supper are signs of Christ's body and blood and reminds us of God's providence and love (1 Cor 11:23-26).

8.1 Administering

- a. A minister or another office bearer duly authorized administers the sacraments. Whenever possible at least one member of the Council would be present and the Word be preached.
- b. The Church Council determines the procedures for the administering of and the admission to the Holy Communion and Baptism.

8.1.1 Baptism

- a. Baptism is administered by a minister, using water, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

b. The Church accepts both the covenant baptism and repentance baptism as forms of the sacrament.

8.1.2 Holy Communion

a. Holy Communion is served using bread and wine / grape juice as symbols.

9.0 EDUCATION

9.1 Nurturing of Faith

Children or adults who desire to proclaim their faith, receive faith education in order to join the church.

The Church Council is responsible for ensuring that faith education is not neglected. It is the responsibility of parents to ensure that children attend faith education classes.

9.1.1 Faith Education Facilitator

A Faith Education Facilitator is appointed by the Church Council and he / she reports on faith education to the Church Council when requested.

9.1.2 Teachers

Professing members of the church who lead classes are guided by the Faith Education Facilitator.

9.1.3 Teaching Materials

The Church Council decides which material will be covered in each year of faith education as well as which textbooks and material will be used.

9.2 Equipping members

The Church Council organize and equip members to be actively involved in ministry as commanded by the Scriptures as to edify of the body of Christ and to expand the kingdom of God.

9.3 Equipping office bearers

In order to perform their tasks to the best of their ability, it is the responsibility of every elected office bearer to expand his / her knowledge of the Word of God and to familiarise him / her with the duties and responsibilities called for by the office. It is the responsibility of the Church Council to ensure that office bearers are adequately equipped for their duties.

10.0 MISIONARY RESPONSIBILITY

The Church acknowledges her responsibility in the spreading of the Gospel wherever possible and will be actively involved.

11.0 EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Any formal relations or statements issued as well as the formalization of ecumenical relationships on behalf of the Church, are considered and approved by the General Assembly.

12.0 SUPERVISION AND DISCIPLINE

Ecclesiastical supervision and discipline is essential to

- a. Uphold the glory of God;
- b. Reconcile the sinner with God, the Church and his/her neighbour;
- c. Maintain the purity of the church.

12.1 SUPERVISION

- a. The ecclesiastical supervision and discipline should always be of a spiritual nature. Therefore, the Church Council members in the exercise thereof, should avoid where possible, the tone of the civil administration. They may never consider themselves as judges, but act as fatherly figures in trying to return the offenders from their sinful paths with deep humility before God and with tender love and attention, irrespective of the person.
- b. It is all members in the church's duty to reprimand one another. It is the responsibility of the minister (s) and the elder (s) in particular.
- c. The ecclesiastical supervision and discipline extends to the life and doctrine of all members, including office bearers and ministers, and discipline covers all punishable sins against the Word of God, the confession of the church and the order and discipline in the church.

12.2 DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES

When disciplinary measures are applied there should be clearly distinguished between a single offense and persistence in sin. The following guidelines apply:

12.2.1 Church Members

- a. The sins from which the member repents after having been lovingly admonished by one person alone or in the presence of two or more witnesses, should not be brought to the attention of the Church Council.
- b. If the member, after having been lovingly admonished by two or more persons, does not respond or if a public sin is conducted, it must be brought to the attention of the Church Council.
- c. Those that reject the admonition of the Church Council may be placed under censorship. Censorship includes withholding of the sacraments, and the suspension of membership rights.
- d. If there is sufficient evidence of repentance by the member, the censorship is lifted by the Church Council and the membership is reinstated or the member is reappointed in his / her position.

e. Where censorship was applied and the member persisted in sinful ways, he / she may be disconnected from the church by the Church Council.

12.2.2 Members of the Church Council

- a. The procedure as in 11.2.1 above applies in the case of Church Council members.
- b. If a Council member engages in a shameful public sin, he/she is immediately suspended from the office by the Church Council.
- c. After thorough investigation by the church council, he/she may be expelled by the Church Council with loss of the use of the sacraments and other membership privileges or be reappointed in his / her position.

12.2.3 Minister

- a. If a minister's conduct and life is not consistent with the Word of God, he/she is lovingly admonished by the elders with or without the knowledge of the Church Council, according to Matthew 18.
- b. If a minister engages in a shameful public sin, he is immediately suspended by the Church Council without loss of salary. .
- c. After thorough investigation by the Church Council, the minister is dealt with according to the results of the investigation. Such a disciplinary process is conducted in accordance with all relevant employment and other legislation procedures that apply in Australia.

12.3 Appeal/Request for mediation

- a. Any person who is dissatisfied with the disciplinary action against him / her, may approach the General Assembly for the purpose of mediation.
- b. The procedures of the General Assembly do not deprive a person the right to take further steps in accordance with the Labour Legislation (Employment Relations Act 2000).

13.0 PROPERTIES AND OTHER ASSETS OF THE CHURCH

- a. Because each congregation has its own legal entity, congregations retain full ownership of their properties and assets.
- b. On dissolution of a congregation the property and other assets of the particular congregation are transferred to another congregation of the Church. The Church Council of the congregation being dissolved determines to which congregation (-s) it is transferred according to their Constitution.
- c. No church will incur debt, which indebts the Church as a whole.

14.0 AMENDMENT OF CHURCH ORDER

Amendment of the Church Order is as defined in Clause 5.3