

The Regulations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia

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1 Terms of Communion

The Terms of Communion are numbers 1-3 of the Covenant of Church Membership as found in the Constitution paragraph 1.2.3.

2 Questions to All Candidates for Office

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you believe that the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and in the Catechisms, Larger and Shorter, to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God, and as such do you acknowledge them to be your confession of faith?
3. Do you believe the principles of worship, discipline and government practised and adhered to by the Reformed Presbyterian Church are founded on the Word of God and agreeable thereto?
4. Do you promise through grace, to assert, maintain, and conform to the system of doctrine, principles of worship, discipline, and government of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, and that you will follow no divisive courses therefrom either in theory or in practise?
5. Do you promise to be subject to all church courts under whose jurisdiction you will come, to maintain their enactments, promote their peace and unity, take a due interest in their proceedings, and labour to advance their usefulness and honour, in conformity to the Word of God to the utmost extent of your ability?
6. Are you willing to take part with us in the public service of Christ, not from ambition or any other carnal motive, but out of zeal for God's glory, love to the Redeemer, and an earnest desire for the salvation of souls and the promotion of the peace and prosperity of the church?

3 Additional Questions to Candidates to Office of Elder Before Installation

1. Do you engage, through grace, to the performance of the following ministerial duties:
 - a. To seek to know the power of God through the word and Holy Spirit in your own life that you may be able to expound and apply the word from personal experience of its truth
 - b. To be diligent in the use and development of your gifts whether given in study, in preaching, in exhortation, in visiting, in care of the sick, in training of the young, or in any other area where God has gifted you
 - c. To be careful to speak to the conscience in a direct and searching manner in whatever opportunity you may receive and not to be satisfied with mere impersonal statements of doctrine
 - d. Not to be silent in relation to Christ's public cause, but to assert the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ over the individual, and over the church, and over the nation in all its affairs and relationships
 - e. To endeavour to know particularly the condition of the flock committed to your care, that you may the better apply the Word to their cases both in public and private
 - f. To do your part faithfully in administering among them discipline of the church?
2. Do you engage to rule well your own house, and to live a holy and circumspect life, adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, and setting an example of piety in every relationship of life to the flock over which you are about to become overseer?
3. Do you accept the office of elder of this congregation, and engage to perform the duties of pastor among this people, as you shall answer "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints"?

4 Usual Steps for Licensure

1. Practical requirements:
 - a. That reports be requested from the Department of Practical Theology of the candidate's theological college for information regarding the candidate's field work and general suitability
 - b. That the candidate prepare during the summer vacation before their final year of theological college an exegetical paper on a passage assigned
 - c. That written work be required setting out the guidelines for biblical worship
 - d. That the candidate conduct a public worship service including preaching on a text previously submitted for approval, leading in prayer and introducing items of praise.
2. Personal considerations:
 - a. That the Presbytery ask the candidate to state his position in respect to Scripture and the Confession.
 - b. That Presbytery ascertain the candidate's willingness to submit to the authority of Presbytery.
 - c. That Presbytery ascertain the candidate's agreement with the system of doctrine and principles of worship, discipline, and government of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia.
 - d. That Presbytery enquire as to the candidate's Christian faith and life.

5 Plan for Presbytery Visitation

5.1 Definition of the term

Presbytery visitation is one of the processes whereby the Presbytery maintains faithful supervision over the congregations within its bounds. It involves, by means of an appointed Commission, direct contact with and evaluation of each of the congregations according to a uniform plan and schedule.

5.2 General objectives

1. To promote and encourage the spiritual life and health of the congregations.
2. To stimulate self-evaluation of the goals, activities, and programs of the congregations, by both members and the officers.
3. To discover any areas of need or problem where the Presbytery may be of help (cf. II Corinthians 1:24).

5.3 Procedures

1. Presbytery shall draw up a schedule of visitation of the congregations, and appoint Commissions to conduct these visitations. Presbytery's visitation commissions shall be comprised of no less than three persons. Presbytery may appoint one of its standing committees as a visitation commission.
2. Presbytery shall visit each congregation within its bounds at least once every five years.
3. Presbytery shall provide a general outline to be used in such visitations.
4. Suitable dates for the visitation shall be arranged between Presbytery's Commission and the Session of the congregation at least three months in advance, and at this time the congregation to be visited shall be informed of the planned Visitation and provided with the general outline of the process and purpose
5. At least one month prior to the visitation, survey questions are to be sent to each of the following using a web-based survey tool (hardcopies shall be made available to members as required, and the commission will enter these in electronically on behalf of that member):
 - a. Session
 - b. Managers and/or deacons
 - c. The entire congregation.

The information from these surveys will be used by the Commission to guide subsequent interviews. Elders and managers/deacons shall be invited to their respective interview and also the congregational interview. The deadline for completing these shall be one week prior to the visitation.

6. During the Visitation, separate private interviews shall be arranged with each of the following:
 - a. Minister(s) of the Word (including wife - optional)
 - b. Session (without the Minister(s) of the Word)
 - c. Managers and/or deacons
 - d. The entire congregation.

Presbytery's commission shall also be available to meet with anyone who may wish a personal interview.

7. The Commission will prepare a report of the visitation and submit it to the Presbytery for approval. When assessing the report, Presbytery should be mindful of sensitive information, and where appropriate, this should only be included in a report to the Session. The approved report(s) shall then be delivered to the congregation (and Session separately where applicable) in person and invite questions.
8. The Session of the congregation will report to the second regular Presbytery meeting following the delivery of the report, and also one year following that meeting, on the process and on how the recommendations in the report have been implemented.

5.4 Survey questions for elders

The Visitation Commission may require the elders to complete a Bible Study assignment before the day scheduled for the Visitation. These responses may be discussed later in subsequent interviews.

While it is recognised that there is only one office of elder, within this office there are distinct gifts and functions as indicated in 1 Timothy 5:17. Consequently the following questions should be regarded as guidelines only and be directed with due regard to the distinction indicated in the above passage.

The following are ranking questions that are rated between Strongly Agree and Strongly Disagree. There will be a free text opportunity at the end of this section to allow elders to expand on ranking questions.

1. There is effective nurture of children in the families of the congregation
2. We have effective training programs within the congregation
3. We work together well as a team in making decisions and leading ministries in the congregation
4. There is an effective program for pastoral visitation in the congregation
5. Our congregation is focused on personal and corporate outreach
6. Session proactively communicates plans and decisions to the congregation
7. Members of the congregation are assisted in knowing and using their gifts
8. Newcomers are warmly welcomed and enfolded into the life of the church

The following questions are free text questions:

1. What do you think spiritual oversight means? Evaluate your own leadership role in seeing the 'Purposes' of the congregation fulfilled. What are you emphasizing? What is being neglected?
2. List the various activities which take place in the congregation. How and how well do these various activities of the congregation help to fulfill the goals of the congregation?
3. Are you able to stay spiritually healthy personally? As a family?
4. Are there particular difficulties making your work hard?
5. What are the aims of the preaching and teaching ministry; in what ways are you being personally involved in the equipping of the saints for service (i.e., teaching, counseling, attendance, evangelism, etc. Eph 4:12) Are they responsive?
6. What is the working relationship between the Session and other organised groups in the congregation, e.g., managers, study groups. How is information communicated?
7. Do you keep up-to-date records regarding members (resident and non-resident), adherents and baptisms. How often do you update the membership roll?

8. Are there any matters affecting the welfare of the congregation that you wish to bring to the attention of Presbytery?
9. The following questions are to be put to the Minister(s) of the Word. How do you devote yourselves to the study of God's Word and prayer? How do you prepare to feed the flock under your care? Outline your preaching program over the past year and your goals for the coming year?

5.5 Interview with Deacons or Managers

The following are ranking questions that are rated between Strongly Agree and Strongly Disagree. There will be a free text opportunity at the end of this section to allow managers to expand on ranking questions.

1. We work together well as a team in making decisions and undertaking our work
2. We receive appropriate direction and support from the elders
3. We have effective programs for meeting the physical needs of members, newcomers and visitors
4. We have an effective program for caring for the church, manse, grounds, and other properties
5. We understand costs for maintaining these into the future

The following questions are free text questions:

1. Does the Congregation's financial picture show good stewardship and faithful proportional giving? Discuss. (Note: having available copies of financial reports and budgets would be helpful).
2. How is the congregation kept informed concerning financial matters? Are your records audited annually?
3. Are your provisions for your Pastor's salary and expenses in line with the recommendations of Presbytery's Finance Committee? Explain.
4. Are Title Deeds to your property and other legal matters in good order? Are legal documents kept in safe custody?
5. Are there matters or questions that you wish to bring to the notice of Presbytery?

5.6 Interview with the Congregation

The following are ranking questions that are rated between Strongly Agree and Strongly Disagree. There will be a free text opportunity at the end of this section to allow members to expand on ranking questions.

1. The preaching is faithful to God's Word
2. The preaching applies God's Word well to the needs of the congregation.
3. Members of the congregation are being well shepherded by the elders
4. Opportunities are being given to members to build one another up in their faith
5. God is using this congregation in the furtherance of his kingdom in the world
6. Our congregation is prayerful
7. I would feel comfortable inviting someone to a worship service or church activity
8. I am being equipped for and actively being encouraged to be involved in outreach

The following questions are free text questions:

1. What are the best possibilities for 'outreach' by your congregation?
2. What suggestions do you have for strengthening the spiritual life and vitality of the congregation?
3. Are there any matters affecting the welfare of the congregation that you wish to bring to the notice of Presbytery?

6 Election and Call of Elders

Although there is one office of elder in the church, some elders are set apart for special tasks in the work of shepherding the congregation, which normally means that they assume the major teaching and preaching role. Although the spiritual requirements as set out in the Scriptures are the same for all elders, special tasks require special training beforehand and carry with them the expectation of faithful performance of special duties after installation. The procedures for calling and installing elders will necessarily vary somewhat depending on the role to which the man is called.

6.1 Regulations common to all elders

- 6.1.1 Session shall determine the need for the appointment of elders
- 6.1.2 The roll of members is to be checked by Session
- 6.1.3 Session shall take steps to determine the readiness of congregation to call an elder. If the Session deems the congregation is ready to call an elder it shall petition Presbytery for oversight in the matter
- 6.1.4 Presbytery having approved, the session shall make arrangements for a meeting of the congregation to elect an elder, at which the Presbytery's representative shall be present
- 6.1.5 Meetings for the election of elders shall be publicly announced to the congregation on two Sabbaths before the day of the election, shall be presided over by the moderator of Session, and shall have decisions recorded in the minute book of Session
- 6.1.6 At the congregational meeting for the election:
 - b. The Session shall be constituted.
 - c. It shall be determined whether a quorum of the Congregation is present.
 - d. Public Worship shall be conducted with a message from God's Word given
- 6.1.7 Only those candidates who have received appropriate training and approval may be voted upon. Only full members of the congregation may vote. Other votes shall not be counted. (Constitution 2.1.3-2.1.5, 3.2.1)
- 6.1.8 In exceptional circumstances, a voting member unable to attend may send his or her vote in writing signed in the presence of a witness and addressed to the Session. Or, he or she may, by letter to the Session, authorise a voting member present to vote for the absentee. The person so authorised shall have the power to act for the absent member throughout.
- 6.1.9 The moderator shall without delay:
 - b. Inform the elected candidate(s) of the results of the election and other relevant facts from the meeting
 - c. Lay the call before Presbytery at its next meeting.
- 6.1.10 Presbytery shall:
 - a. Determine whether the call is regular, and take action to sustain it or not
 - b. Give opportunities for the Congregations affected by this call to be heard with their reasons for or against the call, if they desire to give them
 - c. Determine whether to present the call to the elected candidate, and if so, ask for his response within a specified time period. An immediate response may be given if desired.

- d. Upon acceptance of the call, and if appropriate to the circumstances, dissolve the relationship between the elder and his present congregation relative to a specified date. This is done with prayer.
- e. Request the Session to arrange for the ordination and/or installation of the elected candidate.
- f. If the call is declined, return the call to the Congregation with appropriate counsel regarding the future.

6.2 Regulations pertaining to the Call of Ministers of the Word

- 6.2.1 Presbytery shall appoint to a session a minister to provide pastoral assistance where required when a congregation is without a called minister.
- 6.2.2 Before petitioning Presbytery for oversight in the calling of a minister a session shall assess the congregation's ability to pay the minister the amount required by Presbytery.
- 6.2.3 The vote shall be taken by ballot irrespective of the number of nominations. (The roll may be called to collect ballots).
 - a. A candidate receiving seventy percent or more of the votes cast is elected. However, if no candidate has this majority, all nominations shall be allowed to remain in all future rounds of voting. The results of each round will be communicated to the meeting and provision made for discussion on the merits of the candidates. Votes shall be taken until one candidate receives the required majority, or it appears that no candidate will receive the required majority. In the latter case the session may decide to call for further nominations and begin the election process over again or adjourn the meeting. Blank votes shall be counted as votes cast.
 - b. It is the duty of a minority in all ordinary circumstances to concur in the election. This may be done by a vote to make the call unanimous.
- 6.2.4 The 'Form of Call of Ministers' shall have the candidate's name inserted and be attested by the session.
- 6.2.5 A statement describing the salary package shall be approved and be attached to the 'Form of Call of Ministers'

6.3 Regulations pertaining to the Call of Other Elders

- 6.3.1 If remuneration is being offered in the calling of an elder then session shall assess the congregation's ability to pay before petitioning Presbytery for oversight in the matter.
- 6.3.2 The vote shall be taken by ballot. (The roll may be called to collect ballots).
 - a. Members shall write on voting slips the names, up to the number required, of those they wish to be elected. Only those having a majority of 70% or more of votes cast may be declared duly elected. When more than enough candidates have a majority only those with the largest majority up to the number required will be considered elected. If the candidates elected are fewer than the number of vacancies, then the session may decide to call for further nominations and begin the election process over again among the unelected candidates or adjourn the meeting.
 - b. It is the duty of a minority in all ordinary circumstances to concur in the election. This may be done by a vote to make the call unanimous.
- 6.3.3 The 'Form of Call of Elders' shall have the elected candidate's name inserted and be attested by the session.
- 6.3.4 If applicable, a statement describing the salary package shall be approved and attached to the 'Form of Call of Elders'.

7 Lord's Supper Regulations

Directions for the Lord's Supper are found in Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:17-20 and I Corinthians 11:17-34. I Corinthians 10 is also instructive. Further reference can be made to WCF Chapter xxvii and WSC Q. 91-97. The scriptures don't prescribe or direct us to prescribe an exact formula for conducting Lord's Supper. However, the following guidelines are indicated for the appropriate conducting of Lord's Supper.

1. Lord's Supper is to be conducted as a memorial and reminder of the Lord's death, along with the implications of his death for believers.
2. Lord's Supper is only to be partaken by disciples of Christ in a manner worthy and reflective of the Saviour's institution.
3. Session is at all times responsible for the oversight of the sacrament, and appropriate administration of it.
4. Lord's Supper is to be conducted in such a way as to facilitate fellowship with the Lord, and with each other.
5. Lord's Supper is to be appropriately celebrated through thanksgiving and partaking of the elements of bread and wine.
6. Lord's Supper should promote peace and unity in the church, and where this is not so, it should be suspended until reconciliation is evident.
7. In connection with the Lord's Supper, participants should be examining themselves to ensure they do not partake in an unworthy manner.
8. Lord's Supper should not be taken by, or given to, those who have not made a credible profession of faith, nor to those who persist unrepentant in wilful sin.

8 Forms of Papers for Church Courts

8.1 The Formula signed by Ministers upon their Installation

“I believe that the system of doctrine set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith as approved by the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Australia and in the Catechisms Larger and Shorter is founded on and agreeable to the Word of God and as such I subscribe it as the confession of my faith”.