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# CONSTITUTION

...to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus  
to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

*Eph 3:21*

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**THE REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH OF RICHMOND**

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## **Preamble**

In glad submission to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruling and Living Head of the church and to the Word of God written, as contained in all the books of the New Testament, we, the members of the Reformed Baptist Church of Richmond, declare and establish this constitution.

## **Article I: Name**

The name of this church shall be The Reformed Baptist Church of Richmond.

## **Article II: Statement of Faith**

The Reformed Baptist Church of Richmond subscribes to the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, in its original text, as the statement of faith which most accurately expresses orthodox doctrine. The articles of this constitution must be interpreted from the theological perspectives of that statement.

## **Article III: Affiliation**

### **Section 1: Jurisdiction**

We recognize no ecclesiastical entity as having jurisdiction over this church. Christ alone, as Head of the church (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18), is our authority who governs the church through duly qualified elders by the common suffrage.

### **Section 2: Cooperation**

The church will cooperate with other churches, with whom we stand in substantial doctrinal agreement, in matters pertinent to the edification of the churches and the advance of the gospel. While we desire to cultivate and nurture relationships with like-minded churches, no decision or action of any other church shall be deemed as binding on this church.

## **Article IV: Membership**

### **Section 1: Qualification**

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ, demonstrates the fruits of regeneration, has substantial agreement with this church's statement of faith and is willing to submit to the government and discipline of this church, shall be eligible for membership.

### **Section 2: Reception of Members**

1. A person who desires to become a member of the church must indicate such to the elders and be interviewed by them. The purpose of the interview(s) shall be to examine the candidate for membership in view of the necessary qualifications as set forth in Section 1 of this article.
2. If the candidate is or has been a member of another church, the elders may contact that church in order to ascertain the candidate's previous status and reasons for leaving.
3. Upon the conclusion of the elders' examination of the prospective member, they shall announce their findings at a stated meeting of the church. If the candidate is recommended to the congregation for membership, a designated period of time will then be announced by the elders wherein the membership may express objection or questions concerning the candidate's qualifications for membership. Following such a designated time and upon investigation and resolution of valid objections, the candidate shall be presented to the church to be received into the membership by the common suffrage. A minimum of two-thirds majority of those present and voting is required for the candidate to be received into the membership. If the candidate is not recommended by the elders the church shall be so notified.

### **Section 3: Duties of Members**

1. All members are required to attend all the stated meetings of the church unless providentially hindered (illness, emergency, and other extraordinary circumstances).

The stated meetings of this church are all the Lord's Day services (the Bible Study classes, morning and evening worship services), the midweek prayer meeting and any other meetings which the elders shall deem necessary to call.

2. All members are to contribute financially to the life and ministry of the church. Tithes and offerings are to be given, not grudgingly or under compulsion, but freely and cheerfully as a grateful expression of worship and a means to support the work of the church.
3. All members are to submit to and obey the elders as they discharge their duties of instruction and superintendence in accord with the Word of God.
4. All members are to willingly cooperate with the deacons as they administer the ordinary and outward affairs of the church.
5. All members are to carry out the responsibilities members have to one another. The primary responsibility from which all others proceed is to love (I Peter 4:8). Those mutual duties which are the issues of love are such things as forgiveness, forbearance, burden-bearing, prayer, sharing of material goods, exhortations, admonition, hospitality, and constant assembling together.
6. All members are to guard and maintain the unity of the church by disciplining one's speech, quickly resolving offenses and rebuking disaffected people. Disaffected and discontented people are to be given no hearing but should be directed to speak with the elders.
7. All members are to heed the design for domestic life revealed in the Scriptures. The husband is to exercise a loving leadership over the wife and wise management of the household. The wife is to be subject to her husband in everything. Father and mother are to bring up their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. The consistent practice of family worship is to be a central feature of a biblically ordered domestic life.

8. All members are to employ the various other means of growing in grace such as daily Bible reading and private prayer.
9. All members are to properly observe the Christian Sabbath, or the Lord's Day.
10. All members are to manifest their love for the Triune God by consistent endeavors to obey the letter and spirit of the Law of God.

## Section 4: Responsibility

The elders shall have the responsibility of upholding the aforesaid duties in Section 3 of this article by such means (instruction, admonition, corrective discipline) as they deem appropriate.

## Section 5: Termination of Membership

Membership in this church shall be terminated by means of:

1. **Physical Death.**
2. **Letter of Transfer and Recommendation.** When it is so requested the elders may grant to a departing member in good standing a letter of transfer and recommendation to another church of like faith and practice. No such letter will be granted to a member under the corrective discipline of the church. Further, the elders may refuse to grant such a letter to any church which is, in their judgment, unorthodox.
3. **Exclusion.** At the discretion of the elders, a member may be excluded from the membership. Such an action will often be accompanied by admonition and censure of the excluded member. In such cases no congregational approval shall be required.
4. **Excommunication.** It is the solemn duty of the church to formally put out of the church members who persist in holding and/or propagating heretical doctrine, or in conducting themselves scandalously, divisively, disorderly or impenitently. Procedures to be

followed in such excommunicative action are set forth under Article V of this constitution.

## Article V: Church Discipline

### Section 1: Formative Discipline

Each member of this church is to be under the administration of corporate formative discipline. Among the means of this aspect of church discipline are the stated meetings of the church for worship, preaching, teaching, and prayer, private and mutual instruction and fellowship. These various means and others are intended to cultivate faith and obedience. Such means are superintended by the church's elders. The more effectual the formative discipline the less frequent is the administration of corrective discipline.

### Section 2: Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or scandalous, divisive, disorderly, impenitent conduct appears among any of the church's members. Corrective discipline and the various measures employed in its administration are necessary for the reclaiming of offending members, for deterring other members from similar offenses, for purging the church of sin, for vindicating the honor of Christ and the message of the Gospel and for preventing divine wrath from consuming the church should the church indifferently tolerate offenders and offenses that bring reproach on the New Covenant.

Within the scope of the application of corrective discipline are these measures:

1. **Rebuke and Warning.** A member who is guilty of certain offenses should be rebuked and warned privately by the elders. The failure of a private rebuke to restore an offender will lead to public rebuke and warning.
2. **Suspension.** This corrective measure consists of the public marking out of an offender and the withdrawal of social interaction and specific privileges of membership. II Thessalonians 3:6-15 is the most significant New Testament passage in this connection.

In this action, the offender is still regarded as a brother but the membership is declaring that we have separated ourselves from the offender's example and conduct. Upon evidential repentance and amendment, the offender shall be restored. Upon a protracted condition of impenitence and offensive conduct, excommunication may be employed. Suspension and restoration shall be announced by the elders.

3. **Excommunication.** This, the most severe of corrective measures, consists of putting a professed Christian and church member out of the church membership upon that member's impenitence in sins inconsistent with saving faith. Matthew 18:15-17 and I Corinthians 5 are the two most instructional texts as to the application of excommunication. The act of excommunication is enacted by the common suffrage of the church and shall require the approval of a minimum two-thirds of the members present and voting.

Excommunication may be the church's disciplinary response when a member persists in believing and/or propagating heresy. Further, scandalous conduct, chronic disorderliness of life, divisive and contentious conduct that threatens the church's unity and impenitent obstinacy in any sin inconsistent with saving faith may require this radical, corrective action. Romans 16:17-18, Titus 3:10-11, II Thessalonians 3:6-15, Galatians 1:6-9 and 6:1 are additional texts which must guide the solemn exercise of excommunication.

4. **Exclusion with Admonition and Censure.** There may be occasions whereupon prudence and duty require the admonition and censure of an excluded member. Upon such an occasion the membership is terminated by the elders and corrections and warnings are announced that pertain to the excluded member.

## Article VI: Office Bearers

### Section 1: Introduction

The Lord Jesus Christ alone is Head of the Church. He governs His church through office-bearers whom He qualifies and endows with the necessary capacities to accomplish their appointed work. Office-bearers in the church are of two kinds, elders (also called bishops and pastors) and deacons. It is the duty of the church to discern those whom Christ has set apart for these offices and formally recognize them by the common suffrage.

### Section 2: Elders

1. The qualifications for a man to be set apart unto the office of elder are set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. No man shall be installed into this office unless he exhibits all the qualities identified.
2. The two great departments of the duty given to the elder are that of instruction and of oversight (government, superintendence of the church). The bearers of this office are to provide the membership with a vital teaching and preaching ministry of the Word of God and keep watch over and manage the people of God under their care. These duties are to be carried out according to the truths of the Scriptures.
3. The members of the church have the duties of submitting to and obeying the instruction and government of the elders.
4. Ideally, a plurality of elders shall exist at all times in the life of the church. The great responsibilities of shepherding the flock of God and ruling the household of God demand that more than one man labor in parity in this office. Yet it is recognized that in the providence of God some churches, particularly new or smaller ones, may have only one man duly qualified for the office.
5. In view of the nature of the responsibilities of the eldership and with the light of I Timothy 5:17-18, it is very desirable that at least one elder devote his full vocational

time and energies to the office and its duties. Such men are to be sufficiently compensated financially (I Corinthians 9:9-11, 14; I Timothy 5:17-18).

6. Among any existing plurality of elders an appropriate division of labor shall likely exist. Due to such factors as vocational demands, experience and gifts some may be more engaged in formal and public teaching/preaching, while others may be more engaged in private teaching, counseling and governing. Such a possible division of labor does not diminish the qualification of “apt to teach”, which applies to every elder nor does it erode the parity which is to exist among the plurality.
7. There shall be no fixed number of elders. Their terms shall run as long as they are able to discharge their duties and exhibit all the necessary qualifications. It is the duty of the church to recognize all those men whom the Holy Spirit has made overseers.
8. While elders are overseers and shepherds of the flock of God, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder as a member of the church is under the oversight of his fellow elders.

### **Section 3: Deacons**

1. The qualifications for this office are identified in Acts 6:3 and I Timothy 3:8-13. No man shall be recognized as a deacon unless he exhibits all the qualifications named.
2. Deacons are responsible to administer the ordinary, outward and secular affairs of the church. Additionally, the deacons are to administer the benevolent concerns of the church. All of the duties of the deacons are exercised in cooperation with and subjection to the elders.
3. The members have the duty of being available to and cooperative with the deacons in their various labors.

4. Ideally, a plurality of deacons shall exist at all times in the life of the church. The nature and range of the services to be performed by this office demand, if possible, more than one deacon.

## **Section 4: Appointment of Office-Bearers**

1. The church is responsible to select and set apart men unto the offices of elder and deacon. The selection process is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayer, patience, consideration of the relevant texts of scripture and impartial, objective evaluation of the prospective men.
2. Nominations to the offices of elder and deacon shall be made by the existing elders. A standing solicitation of the member's thought respecting prospective men for these offices exists.
3. Nominations to the offices of elder and deacon shall be announced sufficiently in advance of the business meeting of the church wherein a vote shall be taken. In a called business meeting prior to the meeting wherein a vote shall be taken discussion will be entertained relative to the prospective office-bearers. The congregational vote shall be taken in a succeeding meeting. It is highly desired that the vote of the church be unanimous, but if unanimity is not realized no less than the approval of two-thirds of the members present and voting shall be required for the election of an office-bearer.
4. Following the election of an office-bearer, he shall be publicly installed in his office at a designated worship service.
5. Office-bearers are subject to the duties of members and the discipline of the church as are all the other members. They shall occupy an office as long as they are faithful to their duties, continue to evidence the necessary qualifications for the respective office and have the confidence of the membership. An office bearer may resign his office if for valid reasons he is no longer able to discharge its duties.

## **Section 5: Removal of Office-Bearers**

The elders may call a church business meeting for the purpose of removing an existing office-bearer. No less than two-thirds of the members present and voting must consent to the removal. I Timothy 5:19-20 pertains to this kind of action.

## **Section 6: Reconfirmation**

The church shall reconfirm (or withdraw its confidence) in each office-bearer four years after his ordination and every fourth year thereafter. For those office-bearers in office as of January 1, 1993, the fourth year calculation shall apply as if they were ordained in 1989. The meeting for a congregational vote of reconfirmation shall be announced at least three months in advance of such meeting. During the period between the announcement and the meeting each member of the church is to give prayerful consideration of the texts of scripture which concern the qualifications and duties of the elder and/or deacon. Each member is to carefully reflect upon the office-bearer to be reconfirmed, considering his life and performance in view of the pertinent texts of scripture. Should reservations exist in the judgment of any member, he/she should express such to the office-bearer under scrutiny and if not resolved, to the other elders. Such efforts are required in order to validate a negative vote (a vote to withdraw confidence) in the public meeting. During the meeting for reconfirmation the office-bearer under review and members of his immediate family shall leave the public assembly. The presiding elder shall read and comment upon those texts dealing with office-bearer's qualifications and duties. The office-bearer's qualifications and performance of duties shall be publicly discussed in the fear of God, with due respect for the reputation of the man and under the moderating direction of the presiding elder. Any member who suggests that confidence should be withdrawn must have previously spoken with the office-bearer under review and with the elders. Any office-bearer, about whom objections are expressed, is permitted to return to the public meeting and respond. A written and signed ballot will be taken. It is greatly desired that the vote of the church be unanimous. If unanimity is not realized, no less than two-thirds of the members present and voting for reconfirmation is required for the office-bearer to continue in his office. Any office-bearer who fails to receive reconfirming votes in a majority of two-thirds of the members present and voting is, thereby, dismissed from his office.

## **Article VII: Trustees**

Pursuant to the laws of the State of Virginia the membership shall elect a board of trustees which shall consist of three male members, one-third of whom shall be elected annually by the church for a term of three years. Trustees may be elected from among the office-bearers or the membership at large. The trustees shall hold in trust the church's property. They shall represent the church in legal matters but shall not act without a specific vote of the church authorizing such action. The trustees shall affix their signatures to legal documents where required. In the discharge of their duties, the trustees shall act only at the direction of the office-bearers.

## **Article VIII: Church Business Meeting**

### **Section 1: Frequency**

There shall be an annual business meeting for the hearing of various reports and the transaction of other necessary business. Additional business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

### **Section 2: Notice**

The annual business meeting shall be announced at least seven days prior to the meeting. Other business meetings shall be announced as far in advance as possible, but in no event less than forty-eight hours.

### **Section 3: Quorum**

Members in good standing (not under discipline) present shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. At the discretion of the elders, a called business meeting may be postponed or canceled.

### **Section 4: Presiding**

One of the elders shall preside at all business meetings.

## **Section 5: Voting**

1. All members in good standing (not under discipline) may vote on any question properly brought before the church.
2. Unanimity shall at all times be sought. When not realized not less than a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting shall be required to validate a proposed action.
3. At the discretion of the eldership provisions for voting in absentia may be made. In such cases where voting in absentia is allowed such a vote(s) shall be considered as “present and voting” in its effect on any necessary majority.

## **Article IX: By-Laws**

The elders shall compose and enact such by-laws, as they deem necessary for the implementation of this constitution. No by-law, which is in violation of this constitution, shall be valid. By-laws, which are established, shall be announced to the congregation.

## **Article X: Amendments**

### **Section 1: Majority Required**

This constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present and voting at a duly convened business meeting of the church.

### **Section 2: Notice**

No proposed amendment may be voted upon which has not been distributed to the membership at least two weeks prior to the business meeting designated for that purpose.