

CONSTITUTION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCHES OF WESTERN CANADA

PREAMBLE

Churches of the same faith and order, being of one and the same Spirit, as they are branches of one and the same body, holding to one and the same head, having one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, ought to hold communion among themselves, for their peace, increase of love, and mutual edification. Therefore, in the discharge of those relative duties that may tend to the mutual benefit and edification of Christ's churches (1 Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 4:5; John 17:20-26), Reformed Baptist churches in Western Canada come together to form an Association.

I. The Nature of an Association of Churches

- A. An association exists to support the manifold needs of churches, such as mutual encouragement, support, edification, accountability, and cooperative efforts to glorify God by advancing Christ's kingdom.
- B. An association consists of particular churches who have agreed to hold communion together, to promote their own interests and the good of common causes found among them.
- C. Church associations are recommended by the apostolic precedent of Acts 15, the New Testament church practice (see Scripture references in Section III.), and the confessional position of our Particular Baptist forefathers (see the Second London Confession of Faith [2LCF] 26.14-15). The light of nature and Christian prudence further encourage this (2LCF 1.6).

II. The Doctrinal Statement of this Association

We embrace the Second London Confession of Faith as the most accurate expression of that system of doctrine taught in the Bible, which "is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience" (2LCF 1.1). That Confession is the doctrinal statement of this Association.

III. The Purpose of this Association

An association of churches of like faith and practice is of special use and has as its purpose:

- A. To show visible unity by our common faith and practice (John 17:20-26).
- B. To gain greater knowledge, communion, and love with sister churches (1 Corinthians 16:19-20).
- C. To provide advice in difficult cases of varying types (2LCF 26.15; Acts 15:22-29).
- D. To give financial assistance when able (Romans 15:25-26; 2 Corinthians 8:16-24).
- E. To cooperate in the spreading of the gospel both at home and on foreign soil (Philippians 4:10-20).
- F. To supply the pulpits of sister churches in the event one is without a minister of the Word (Acts 11:22-26).
- G. To labor together “for the good and prosperity of all the churches of Christ” (2LCF 26.14; 3 John 5-8).

IV. The Requirements for Membership in this Association

- A. Any church fully subscribing to our Confession of Faith (see Appendix #1) and agreeing with our Constitution may become members of this Association through the process of application.
- B. A church desiring membership in this Association must apply through and with the recommendation of a member church (see Appendix #2). Notice of application must then be given to all member churches, and a meeting shall be scheduled within a reasonable time for the consideration of the application. At that meeting, official representatives of the applying church must appear in order to give satisfactory evidence of the church’s faith, practice, and willingness to support this Association. The applying church shall be received into membership by a simple majority vote (see Section VI.K.).
- C. Any member Church desiring to withdraw from the Association may do so

by submitting a letter of resignation, stating its reason(s). Withdrawal from the Association does not remove the right of the Association to call delinquent churches to account (see Section V.B.).

D. Full voting membership requires regular attendance at messengers' meetings (see Section VI.B.; cf. 2 John 12; 3 John 13-14).

V. The Authority of this Association and its Limitations

A. Each church is independent, self-governing, and under the authority and control of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, according to the Word of God (see 2LCF 26.4). No outside entity, whether a government, religious group, or another church and its officers, has any power or jurisdiction over one of Christ's churches in church matters.

B. Nevertheless, the Association has a right to call any member church to account, whether for abuse of its power towards its members, neglect of attendance at Association meetings, or deviation from the Confession of Faith in teaching or practice (see Appendix #1). If satisfactory reasons are not given by the church for its actions or lack of reformation thereof, the Association has the authority to exclude that church from its membership. However, this action of exclusion neither disannuls nor destroys the independence of that church (2LCF 26.15).

C. In cases of difficulties or differences between churches in general or among members of individual churches regarding matters pertaining to their peace, union, and edification, the Association messengers may meet to consider the matter and give their advice (2LCF 26.15).

1. After every attempt has been made to reconcile differences by the parties involved, a complaint or grievance can be brought to the Association by any member church through their messengers.

2. Any complaint of members of an Association church must first be made through their local church. If, after due process, the church refuses to make the matter known to the Association, the member(s) may appeal to the eldership of another member church.

3. Doctrinal issues, difficulties, or matters between churches can be placed

on the agenda of the Association's regular meeting by any one of the churches so that the messengers can consider and give their advice.

4. The messengers may appoint an ad hoc council to address such matters if deemed necessary. If possible, such a council shall consist of messengers from at least three different churches not involved in the matter under consideration. Ideally, all council members shall be present at each council meeting. In such cases where this is not possible, two-thirds of the council members shall constitute a quorum. Matters shall be decided by a simple majority vote of the council members present. When such a council concludes its work, it must report back to the assembled messengers with their recommendations so that the messengers of the association may offer determinations and advice to the churches. A church shall not offer determinations and advice on matters pertaining to questions or issues regarding itself (see Section VI.D.).
5. The messengers thus assembled are not armed with coercive power to compel the churches to submit to their determinations and advice.
However, the Association has the prerogative to publish the results of its findings, as deemed necessary.

VI. The Functioning of this Association

- A. When conducting the business of the Association, member churches shall be represented by messengers. Ordinarily, officers of the church will serve as messengers. If a church is without available officers, the congregation may appoint adult male church members in good standing to serve as messengers.
- B. The messengers of the churches shall meet annually to give an account of their particular church's spiritual state, assess needs, consult, make plans for the future, set goals, hear and deal with questions and complaints, etc. Special meetings for Association business may be called at the discretion of the churches.
- C. A voting quorum shall consist of two-thirds of the full, voting member churches (see Section IV.D. and E.). Each full-member church will have one

- vote. This will ensure that no matter how small a congregation may be or how large a congregation may become, no church will ever be without a voice, and no church will ever be able to gain pre-eminence or control over the Association.
- D. A church shall not vote on matters pertaining to questions or issues regarding itself.
 - E. At the final messengers' meeting at the end of each calendar year, the messengers shall elect a Moderator, Vice-Moderator, Secretary, and Treasurer to serve the Association for the following year. The Moderator and Vice-Moderator shall be an elder of a full-member church. The Secretary and Treasurer shall be an officer of a full-member church. The Moderator shall establish the agenda for and chair messengers' meetings and facilitate communication within the Association. The Vice-Moderator shall perform all the duties entrusted by the Moderator or the Association. The Secretary shall record, file, and distribute messengers' meeting minutes to the churches. The Treasurer shall keep record of the finances of the Association and deliver a report to the churches at each messengers' meeting.
 - F. The churches of the Association are encouraged to provide regular updates to the fellow churches and to pray for one another.
 - G. The Association may authorize conferences and various inter-church fellowship activities as the messengers see fit.
 - H. The Association may establish formal and informal relationships with other associations and institutions provided that these relationships help to advance the purposes of the Association and in no way undermine its confessional and constitutional standards.
 - I. The Association shall establish a fund for carrying out its purposes and functions. The distribution of funds shall be approved by the messengers. Contributions to this fund shall be voluntary.
 - J. In the event of dissolution, no one member church or private individual shall be entitled to the assets of this Association. Assets shall be used first to pay outstanding debts. Any remaining assets shall be equally divided among the

- full-member churches in the Association at the time of dissolution.
- K. Any article in this Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the churches represented at an officially called business meeting when the proposed amendment has been distributed in writing to every member church at least sixty days before the vote is taken. Each full-member church shall have one vote. Amendments shall be incorporated into this Constitution after they have been approved.
 - L. All other issues will be decided by a simple majority of the full-member church messengers when a quorum is present (see Section VI.C.).

APPENDIX #1

What Is “Full Subscription?”

Submitted by Dr. James M. Renihan

Confessional subscription employs three main terms in its nomenclature: absolute, strict/full, and loose. ARBCA has adopted the middle position. According to Dr. Morton H. Smith, “strict or full subscription takes at face value” the terminology used in adopting a confession of faith.

In an article entitled “The Case for Full Subscription” (in *The Practice of Confessional Subscription*, ed. by David Hall, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995; pages 185-6), Dr. Smith provides some helpful insights [albeit in a Presbyterian context with a much more developed tradition of discussion of the issue than among Baptists]. He says, “Note some things that full subscription does not mean. First, it does not insist that all of the teachings of the Confession . . . are of equal importance (just as not all of the teachings in the Bible are of equal importance). The full subscriptionist recognizes that some doctrines are more foundational than others, in accord with the Biblical example. Positively, the full subscriptionist believes that in professing that the Confession . . . [is] his confession, he is subscribing to all of the doctrines in the Confession . . . they are all part of the system of doctrine Second, full subscription does not require the adoption of every word of the Confession . . . but positively believes that we are adopting every doctrine or teaching of the Confession”

One should note the language found in the agreement signed by the messengers of the founding churches in Mesa, Arizona in March, 1997; in the ARBCA constitution; and in the application for membership. The first states, “We declare that our primary rule of faith and practice is the inerrant Word of God, and adopt as our subordinate standards the excellent document commonly known as the London Baptist Confession of 1689, and the Constitution of this Association.” The second states, “While we hold tenaciously to the inerrant and infallible Word of God as found in the sixty-six books of the Bible

(this being our final source of faith and practice), we embrace and adopt the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 as a faithful expression of the doctrine taught in the Scriptures. This Confession is the doctrinal standard of the Association,” and in the third the applying church signs this statement: “We accept the London Confession of Faith of 1689 as an accurate and reliable expression of what the Scriptures teach and the faith we confess.” In each case, the member churches commit themselves to the Confession as a whole. We maintain the primacy of the Scriptures, and “embrace and adopt” the Confession as a truthful expression of our convictions with regard to the details of Scripture.

Taken at face value, these words imply, even though they do not explicitly state, strict, or full subscription. This does not mean that we treat every doctrine in the Confession as if it were equally important, but we do commit ourselves to all of the doctrines of the Confession. In addition, as Dr. Smith says so well, “full subscription does not require the adoption of every word of the Confession or Catechisms, but positively believes that we are adopting every doctrine or teaching of the Confession or Catechisms.” This is an important distinction, and needs to be understood. It is possible for an individual, a church, or an association to be cautious about the wording used to express a specific doctrine without denying the doctrine that wording seeks to define. Full subscription honestly adopts all of the doctrines expressed in the confessional formulation. In the case of the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of America, this means that by subscribing to the document commonly known as the London Baptist Confession of 1689, we receive all of the doctrines contained in it as true, founded on the Word of God.

APPENDIX #2

Guidelines for the Reception of New Member Churches

Introduction

This appendix gives guidelines to flesh out the process of application and reception as stated in Article IV.B. of the ARBCWC Constitution. The “church desiring membership” shall be referred to below as the applying church, and the member church “through and with the recommendation of” which the applying church makes application shall be referred to below as the sponsoring church. The burden for vetting the applying church shall rest upon the sponsoring church, though the assembled messengers of the Association shall have the right to request and determine further “satisfactory evidence” as deemed necessary.

Guidelines for Applying Churches

- Identify and cultivate a relationship with an existing member church to serve as your sponsoring church.
- Discuss with your sponsoring church any reservations your officers might have with the Confession or ARBCWC Constitution.
- Instruct your congregation on the Biblical and Confessional basis, nature, and benefits of Associationalism.
- Read and determine your agreement with the ARBCWC Constitution.
- Hold a members’ meeting and an official congregational vote to approve your church’s intention to pursue membership in ARBCWC.
- Have a representative of your church (usually a pastor or other officer) attend at least one worship service at your sponsoring church.
- Invite a pastor of your sponsoring church to attend/preach at one of your worship services.
- Be prepared to give “satisfactory evidence” (Constitution IV. B.) at an Associational Messengers’ Meeting. This will include giving a brief history of your church’s founding, development, and reformation (if applicable); introduction of your officers; description of a typical worship service at your church and of any other regular church meetings; explanation of any reservations your officers might have with the Confession or ARBCWC Constitution.

Guidelines for Sponsoring Churches

- Have your officers meet with representatives of the applying church (usually its pastor[s] or other officers) and review the applying church’s Constitution

and/or Bylaws.

- Interview representatives of the applying church in order to determine its full subscription to the Confession (see Appendix #1) and agreement with the ARBCWC Constitution.
- Invite a pastor of the applying church to attend/preach at one of your worship services.
- At the officers' discretion, hold a members' meeting and an official congregational vote to approve your church's recommendation of the applying church for membership in ARBCWC.
- Notice of application must then be given to all member churches, and a meeting shall be scheduled within a reasonable time for the consideration of the application.
- Notify other member churches of the intentions of the applying church prior to the scheduled meeting and forward the applying church's Constitution and/or Bylaws along with any other relevant information you have learned.

Guidelines for Formal Reception

- The representatives of the new member church will sign a document affirming the church meets all of the requirements as stated in the ARBCWC constitution(see below).
- A representative of the sponsoring church will introduce the new member church and its pastor(s) to the other member churches.

**Signing Document for Formal Reception Into
The Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of Western Canada**

Date:

We certify on behalf
of _____ (Applying Church)

- That our congregation desires to join the Association of Reformed Baptist Churches of Western Canada.
- That our church fully subscribes to the 2LFC as defined in Appendix #1 of the ARBCWC Constitution.
- That we agree with and will abide by the Constitution of ARBCWC.

Representatives of Applying Church:

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

We certify on behalf
of _____ (Sponsoring Church)

- That the above-mentioned applying church meets all of the requirements for membership as stated in the ARBCWC constitution.

Representatives Of Sponsoring Church:

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Title: _____