

# **Rules of Church Order for the Kingdom Network**

The Kingdom Network: A Community of Reformed Churches exists to extend the kingdom of Christ in the world through churches partnering together in the work of making disciples and starting new Christian communities. Churches and pastors entering into membership the Kingdom Network: A Community of Reformed Churches (hereafter called "the Network") agree to covenant together to keep the following practices and procedures, hold other churches and pastors accountable to them, and submit themselves to the due exercise of discipline from the body when found out of accord with them. These rules may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the Global Board of the Kingdom Network.

## **Article 1 - Local Church Government and Responsibility**

Section 1 - Each member church shall have a governing board that oversees the ministry of the local church and makes sure its ministry, including the preaching of the Word of God and administration of the sacraments, are faithful to the Word of God and core values of the Network. This board shall have the care and supervision of the church's property and financial interests. They are the trustees of the church's property, unless the act of incorporation or bylaws of the church, or the statutes of the state in which the church is incorporated, make other provisions.

Section 2- This board shall consist of ordained pastors and lay, ordained officers who have been selected in an orderly process that must include notification of the congregation of names of the nominees and a mechanism to approve, affirm, or elect such pastors and officers.

Section 3 - Non-pastoral board members shall serve terms that are not to exceed five years, with the exact length of the term and possibility of serving multiple terms being at the discretion of the particular church in accordance with its by-laws and/or policies.

Section 4 - The board shall select a pastor to preside at its meeting and serve as President. The board shall select one of its lay, ordained officers to serve as Vice President. Each board shall have a Clerk to keep a recording of all proceedings of the body.

Section 5 - The church board must meet at least annually and may set up teams and bodies to perform various duties.

Section 6 - Members and officers of a local church are under its care and are subject to its government and discipline, as administered by its Board of Elders (either through the body as a whole or a committee appointed by it) in accordance with Appendix 1.

## **Article 2 - Accountability of Churches**

Section 1 - Network churches shall annually affirm their agreement with the core principles and practices of the Network and shall send documentation of their agreement to the Regional Network's Clerk.

Section 2 - Churches wishing to disaffiliate from the Network shall give thirty (30) days notice to the Network via the Clerk of a planned vote of the church's authorized body for such a vote; such notice should include the reasons it is taking such a vote. While a church body has the ability to withdraw from the Network without any penalty, as part of a covenant community, bodies will fulfill any financial obligations to which they have committed themselves while part of the Network, including (but not exclusive of) ministry works that the Network has committed itself to support for a definite period of time while the church was a member.

Section 3 - Network churches shall provide for the proper support of their pastor(s), and the Regional Network shall review the initial terms and conditions of a call to a Network pastor as well as any substantive changes to compensation and benefits to ensure it is fair and for the mutual benefit of both pastor and church. Such support for full-time ordained pastors shall include health insurance, paid time off (vacation time; sick and/or personal time, etc.), an employer-sponsored retirement plan, life and long-term disability insurance; any exceptions must be discussed and approved by the Network. Churches may also call bi-vocational pastors whose compensation need not contain the provisions mentioned above, but the Regional Network should seek to ensure that ministers and their families are being adequately cared for within their unique situation by offering guidance as appropriate. Any disputes between Network churches and Network pastors shall be mediated and, if necessary, adjudicated, by the Regional Network, which shall designate a point person to whom pastors may come for guidance in dealing with compensation questions or if there are compensation issues that arise between them and their church. The Regional Network can appoint a team or committee to handle reviewing, mediating, and remedying any issues related to pastoral compensation and should send their process and procedures related to pastoral compensation to the Global Board to ensure the fulfillment of this requirement. Please note that health insurance for Kingdom Network pastors is available through the Reformed Benefits Association (RBA). *(Approved by the Regions in 2024 and by the Global Board at their regular meeting on January 9, 2025.)*

Section 4 - A Network church may request help on matters that might be new or difficult or upon which the particular church board or body has serious division; such a request shall be called a reference. References may be for advice or for decision-making. A reference request should include all relevant information and name the representative of the church through whom to communicate. Such references should normally go to the Executive Team of a church's Regional Network first. Upon receiving a reference, the Executive Team will appoint a commission to settle the matter if such reference is received more than sixty (60) days before a stated meeting; if less than sixty (60) days before a stated meeting, the matter will be discussed at the next stated meeting.

Section 5 - Board Members of a Network church shall have the right to send a complaint against a decision or act made by the board to the Regional Network. Such a complaint is a written statement alleging that an action or a decision has violated its own constitution, the rules of the Network, or other laws or regulations of the church or of Scripture. The complaint, along with supporting reasons, shall be filed within sixty (60) days following the meeting at which such decision or action was taken. Notice of complaint does not suspend the action against which the complaint is made while the complaint is being processed unless one-third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of the members present when the action was taken vote for its suspension. Upon receiving a complaint, the Executive Team (excluding any members of the church from which the complaint came) will either call for a special meeting of the Regional Network or will put it on the docket for the next meeting to consider the complaint. The board against which the complaint is made shall appoint one or more representatives to defend its action. No attempt should be made by either party of the complaint to influence the Executive Team or the Regional Network on this

matter. The Network or a commission appointed by it may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the action of the Church Board, or remand the matter to it with instructions.

Section 6 - Members of a Network church (including board members) may appeal the disciplinary decision of a church to the Regional Network when they have submitted to a regular trial. The grounds for an appeal are the following: irregularity in the proceedings of the court; refusal of reasonable indulgence to a party on trial; receiving improper or declining to receive proper evidence; hurrying to a decision before all the testimony is taken; manifestation of prejudice in the case; and mistake or injustice in the judgment and censure. Written notice of the appeal, with supporting reasons, needs to be filed with the Clerk of the Regional Network within thirty (30) days following the trial. Notice of appeal shall have the effect of suspending the judgment of the case until the case has finally been decided. However, the church may, for sufficient reasons recorded, prevent the appellant from approaching the Lord's Table and, if an officer, prevent the appellant from exercising some or all the functions of the office until the case is decided; however, this shall not be done in the way of censure. Upon receiving notice of appeal, the Executive Team (excluding any members of the church from which the appeal came) will either call for a special meeting of the Network or will put it on the docket for the next meeting to consider the appeal. The board against which the appeal is made shall appoint one or more representatives to defend its action. No attempt should be made by either party of the appeal to influence the Executive Team or the Regional Network on these matters. After gathering and examining all evidence, the Regional Network or a commission have a hearing in which each side is allotted thirty (30) minutes for oral argument, the appellant having the right of opening and closing. The Regional Network or commission shall then discuss the merits in a closed session and then take a vote (without debate) on the question of whether each specification of error shall be sustained. It may decide to affirm in whole or part; reverse in whole or part; to render the decision that the church should have rendered; or to remand the case for a new trial. In every case a written opinion shall be prepared and a copy of opinion and judgment will be delivered personally or mailed to the church and appellant as part of record.

Section 7 - The Executive Team of a Regional Network will appoint a Judicial Business Commission to investigate any allegations related to a member church that is deemed to be in violation with the core values and covenant of the Network or are out of accord with Scripture. If found to have merit, the board of the church will be summoned with the charges to appear before the Judicial Business Committee at a specified time and place with the charge provided to the accused. Such a meeting will discuss the matter further; if the Judicial Business Committee determines there is a violation, the church will have an opportunity to remedy the error. If after an extended period of time such an error has not been remedied, the board of the church will be summoned again. If the church continues to refuse to make such a change, the Regional Network can vote to disaffiliate with the church with a two-thirds majority of voting members present at the meeting (excluding representatives from the accused church) or the church can request to be removed from the affiliation. The church and the Network shall seek to communicate to the congregation as to why such a connection has been severed.

### **Article 3 - Accountability of Pastors**

Section 1 - Individuals wishing to become ordained pastors in the Network shall go through a process of candidacy and credentialing. A church can recommend a member sensing a call to ministry to become a candidate for ministry in the Network, with the Regional Network (as a whole or through committee), inquiring of the character and motives of this individual and Page

interviewing the member; if satisfied with the individual's sense of calling, the Regional Network will receive the individual as a candidate upon their affirmation of the questions in Appendix 2.

Section 2 - The Regional Network will work with the individual through a training process to meet the ordination requirements, and this individual remains a member of the local church. A person may withdraw from being a candidate or a church can withdraw its recommendation for the individual's candidacy, upon which the Regional Network will remove the individual from the candidacy list; if the church withdraws its recommendation, it shall state its reasons to the appropriate committee of the Regional Network and inform the individual. Those who are ordained in another body may transfer in as pastors without first being a candidate provided they pass the various examination areas for pastors and affirm the standards and core values of the Network.

Section 3 - The Regional Network shall satisfy itself that all candidates for ministry exhibit training and ministry competence in the areas of 1) Discipleship, 2) Old Testament, New Testament and Biblical Exegesis, 3) Preaching, 4) Church History, 5) Baptism and Communion, 6) Pastoral Care, 7) Leadership, and 8) Reformed Theology. The training in these areas could come through a formal education (e.g. seminary) or alternative tracks, and competency in these areas will be demonstrated through examinations, papers and experiences. The individual must also affirm the standards and core values of the Network. *(This change to the Rules of Church Order reflects the change in the number of Competencies for Ordination and was approved by the Global Board at their regular meeting on January 9, 2025.)*

Section 4 - Upon the successful completion of ordination requirements and the reception of a ministry recognized by the Regional Network, it shall appoint a time for an ordination service of a candidate for ministry that is at least ten days following the final examination. Such a service will feature a sermon suitable for the occasion and explanations and admonitions concerning the duties of a pastor. The candidate will be asked and affirm the questions and sign the ministerial obligation in Appendix 3, after which there will be prayer, laying of hands, and declaration of the ordination of the pastor. Pastors previously ordained by another body do not need to be re-ordained but need to answer these questions and sign the ministerial obligation when examined by the Regional Network for transfer, at which point their acceptance into the Network will be declared.

Section 5 - Part of the ordination vows include submission to the discipline of this body, so all pastors will be accountable to the Regional Network, which shall administer discipline in accordance with Appendix 1.

Section 6 - Pastors shall annually affirm their agreement with the core principles and practices of the Network and shall send documentation of their agreement to the Network's Clerk.

#### **Article 4 - Accountability of Networks**

Section 1 - The Regional Network clerk will communicate with the Clerk of the Global Board that all churches have reaffirmed their agreement with the Network's core values and wisdom documents each year.

Section 2 - Regional Networks shall have the ability to develop by-laws and rules of order to govern their activities. These may supplement or specify the Network by-laws and Rules of Order, but at no point shall they violate or contradict the Network's by-laws or Rules of Order.

Section 3 - Regional Networks can send references arising from a member church that they do not feel able to answer to the Global Board. It can also send references on matters that they seek guidance on pertaining to their own business to the Global Board. A reference request should include all relevant information and the representative of the Network through whom to communicate if that person is not the Regional Network's clerk. Upon receiving a reference, the Global Board will appoint a commission to settle the matter if such a reference is received more than sixty (60) days before a stated meeting; if less than sixty (60) days before a stated meeting, the matter will be discussed at the next stated meeting. The Global Board may call upon churches and pastors in other Regional Networks to assist with such reference.

Section 4 - The Global Board will appoint a Judicial Business Commission to investigate any allegations related to a Regional Network being in violation with the core values and covenant of the Network; such a committee can include pastors and elders who are not on the Global Board itself who assist in the particular case. If found to have merit, the Regional Network Executive Team will be summoned with the charges to appear before the Judicial Business Committee at a specified time and place with the charge provided to the accused. Such a meeting will discuss the matter further and may utilize electronic means of meeting. If the Judicial Business Committee determines there is a violation, the Regional Network will have an opportunity to remedy the error. If after an extended period of time such an error has not been remedied, the Executive Team of the Regional Network will be summoned again. If the Regional Network continues to refuse to make such a change, the Global Board can vote to disaffiliate with the Regional Network with a two-thirds majority of voting members present at the meeting (excluding representatives from the accused Regional Network). Churches in the dissolved Regional Network that wish to remain in the Kingdom Network shall submit such a request to the Global Board, who will then direct such a request and their recommendation about the church to a Regional Network. The church and the Global Board shall seek to communicate to the congregations both the severed connection and the process that led to it.

Section 5 - Pastors and Elders shall have the right to send a complaint against a decision or act made by a Regional Network to the Global Board, including its ruling on a complaint or appeal brought by a board member or pastor, after first bringing the issue up to the Regional Network itself. Such a complaint is a written statement alleging that an action or a decision has violated the rules of the Network, or other laws or regulations of the church or of Scripture. The complaint, along with supporting reasons, shall be filed within sixty (60) days following the meeting at which such decision or action was taken or the Regional Network's response to the complaint. Notice of complaint does not suspend the action against which the complaint is made while the complaint is being processed unless one third ( $\frac{1}{3}$ ) of the members present when the action was taken vote for its suspension. Upon receiving a complaint, the Global Board (excluding any members of the Regional Network from which the complaint came) will either call for a special meeting or will put it on the docket for the next meeting to consider the complaint. The Global Board may appoint a committee of pastors and elders to deal with the complaint and bring its findings to the Global Board, which will approve the final ruling. The Regional Network against which the complaint is made shall appoint one or more representatives to defend its action. No attempt should be made by either party of the complaint to influence the Global Board, any committees designated by it, or the Regional Network on this matter. The Global Board may confirm or reverse, in whole or in part, the action of the Regional Board, or remand the matter to it with instructions.

Section 6 - Pastors and elders of a Regional Network may appeal the disciplinary decision of a Regional Network when they have submitted to a regular trial to the Global Board. The grounds for an appeal are the following: irregularity in the proceedings of the court; refusal of reasonable indulgence to a party on trial; receiving improper or declining to receive proper evidence; hurrying to a decision before all the testimony is taken; manifestation of prejudice in the case; and mistake or injustice in the judgment and censure. Written notice of the appeal, with supporting reasons, needs to be filed with the Clerk of the Global Board within thirty (30) days following the trial. Notice of appeal shall have the effect of suspending the judgment of the case until the case has finally been decided. However, the Regional Network may, for sufficient reasons recorded, prevent the appellant from approaching the Lord's Table and, if an officer, prevent the appellant from exercising some or all the functions of the office until the case is decided; however, this shall not be done in the way of censure. Upon receiving notice of appeal, the Global Board (excluding any members of the Regional Network from which the appeal came) will either call for a special meeting or will put it on the docket for the next meeting to consider the appeal. The Global Board may appoint a committee of pastors and elders to deal with the complaint and bring its findings to the Global Board, which will approve the final ruling. The Regional Network against which the appeal is made shall appoint one or more representatives to defend its action. No attempt should be made by either party of the appeal to influence the Global Board, any committees designated by it, or the Regional Network. After gathering and examining all evidence, the Global Board or its committee have a hearing in which each side is allotted thirty (30) minutes for oral argument, the appellant having the right of opening and closing. The Global Board or commission shall then discuss the merits in a closed session and then take a vote on the question of whether each specification of error shall be sustained. It may decide to affirm in whole or part; reverse in whole or part; to render the decision that the church should have rendered; or to remand the case for a new trial. In every case a written opinion shall be prepared and a copy of opinion and judgment will be delivered personally or mailed to the church and appellant as part of record.

## Appendix 1

### Rules for Discipline

Section 1 - Discipline is the exercise of the authority which the Lord Jesus Christ has given to the church to promote its purity. In its proper usage discipline maintains the glory of God and the purity of His Church and seeks to keep and reclaim disobedient sinners. It is to be exercised in the spirit of mercy, not of wrath, and in accordance with the principles of Matthew 18.

Section 2 - Grounds for disciplines must be something in violation of Scripture.

Section 3 - The following actions may be taken by the Board of Elders (in the case of a church member) or the Regional Network (in the case of an ordained pastor): admonition, suspension from the sacraments, suspension (definitely or indefinitely) from the office, deposition from office, and excommunication.

Section 4 - With the exception of admonition, disciplinary actions described in section 3 shall only be taken after a process in which there is a formal charge (a written accusation of an offense that names the accused, nature of offense and time, place, and circumstances of it) against an individual that has been delivered to the accused within three (3) days of its receipt by the body of oversight. The overseeing body or a committee appointed by it shall interview the accuser, accused, and witnesses to determine if there is merit for a trial or if the charge shall be dismissed or adjudicated another way. When it is determined that there will be a trial, notice will be sent out by the President and Clerk requesting the accused to appear before the overseeing body (or its commission) at a specified time and place with the charge provided to the accused. The accused shall file a written reply to the charge within twenty (20) days of the receipt; if the accused acknowledges guilt or fails to reply, the overseeing body may impose the appropriate discipline. If contesting or denying the charges, a trial shall be set up no sooner than fourteen (14) days but no less than thirty (30) days from the reply, unless the trial is postponed with the consent of both parties. The Clerk shall issue citations to persons who should appear as witnesses for or against the accused and, at the same time, shall provide a list of witnesses to all parties. Persons who have not received a witness citation may be permitted to testify at trial, if the presiding officer concludes that to allow the testimony will not be fundamentally unfair. Unless the accused refuses or fails to appear after proper notice, all witnesses shall be examined in the presence of the accused and the accused shall be permitted to cross-examine adverse witnesses. Testimony of individuals at a location other than during the trial may be taken at the request of either party, but ten days notice shall be given of this and all parties shall be able to examine and cross-examine these witnesses. Parties may be represented by counsel of their choosing, provided that there is no compensation for their time and efforts and that the counsel is a member of a church within the Network. The only persons who may attend the trial are the involved parties, their counsel, the elders, and other persons the court deems appropriate. A verbatim record of trial, including the judgment shall be preserved and entered into the body's record; parties to the case shall be given reasonable access to the record. No person with a conflict of interest shall be in the deliberation of the trial, and no person connected to the case shall circulate those deciding the case.

Section 5 - The Board of Elders or Regional Network shall notify the congregation of its action of excommunication, but may omit such notification if it will impair the purposes of discipline and best serve the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Such omission shall require two-thirds vote of the body and the rationale for it.

Section 6 - A member who has been suspended from the sacraments or excommunicated may be restored to their privileges upon repentance before the body that tried the case. If public notice of excommunication was given, due public notice shall also be given to the congregation.

Section 7 - A person suspended from office may be restored upon repentance and renewal of vows before the body that tried the case, provided that the body is satisfied that the honor of the office will not be impaired and the welfare of the church will be served by this restoration, and provided that restoration is approved by two-thirds votes of those present at the meeting. Restoration after deposition shall happen after going through the normal means of selection of church officers or pastors and will feature reordination.

## Appendix 2

### Candidacy Questions

Upon recommendation of a church and approval of a Regional Network, those wishing to become candidates for ministry in the Network will answer the following questions:

1. Do you promise in reliance upon the grace of God to maintain a becoming Christian character, and to be diligent and faithful in making full preparation for the sacred ministry?
2. Do you promise to submit yourself to the proper supervision of the Network in matters that concern your preparation for the ministry?

After answering these questions in the affirmative, the candidate shall declare and sign this declaration which shall be in the records of the Network.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in becoming a candidate for the ministry in the Kingdom Network, sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Center Set Beliefs of the Kingdom Network and the wisdom documents as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God. I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the Network, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith and to conduct the work of the church in an orderly way.

### Appendix 3 - Pastoral Ordination Questions

The ordination service of a pastor shall feature the Regional Network approved candidate answering the following questions:



Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ's church, and therefore by God, to this ministry of Word and sacrament?

**Yes, truly, with all my heart.**

Do you believe the books of the Old and New Testaments to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, rejecting all contrary beliefs?

**Yes, truly, with all my heart.**

Do you agree with the core values, mission, and purpose of the Kingdom Network and desire to partner in the expansion of the kingdom of God with this body?

**Yes, truly, with all my heart.**

Will you proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; upholding the witness of Holy Scripture against all schisms and heresies?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you be diligent in your study of Holy Scripture and in your use of the means of grace?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you pray for God's people and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you accept and submit to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine and do you promise if at any time you find yourself out of accord with values or core beliefs of the Network that you will on your own initiative, make known to the Network the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you strive to fulfill faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully, all the duties of a minister of Christ: to preach the Word of God in sincerity, to administer the sacraments in purity, to maintain proper discipline in the household of God, and to shepherd the flock faithfully?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

The pastor shall declare and sign this declaration.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, in becoming an ordained pastor in the Kingdom Network, sincerely and gladly declare before God and with you that I believe the gospel of the grace of God in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. I accept the Scriptures as the only rule of faith and life. I accept the Center Set Beliefs of the Kingdom Network and the wisdom documents as historic and faithful witnesses to the Word of God. I promise to walk in the Spirit of Christ, in love and fellowship within the church, seeking the things that make for unity, purity, and peace. I will submit myself to the counsel and admonition of the Network, always ready, with gentleness and reverence, to give an account of my understanding of the Christian faith and conduct the work of the church in an orderly way. Trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for strength, I pledge my life to preach and teach the good news of salvation in Christ, to build up and equip the church for mission in the world, to free the

enslaved, to relieve the oppressed, to comfort the afflicted, and to walk humbly with God. I ask God, and you His servants, to help me so to live until that glorious day when, with joy and gratitude, we stand before our great God and King.

#### Appendix 4

##### Suggested Vows for Elders and Deacons

The ordination of elders and deacons is the responsibility of the local church. These are recommended questions and vows for these officers in Kingdom Network churches; churches may use them but are free to adapt, alter, or add to them.

Do you believe in your heart that you are called by Christ's church, and therefore by God, to this office?

**Yes, truly, with all my heart.**

Do you believe the books of the Old and New Testaments to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, rejecting all contrary beliefs?

**Yes, truly, with all my heart.**

Do you agree with the core values, mission, and purpose of (Name of Church) and promise to use your abilities to further the expansion of the kingdom of God?

**Yes, truly, with all my heart.**

Will you proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; upholding the witness of Holy Scripture against all schisms and heresies?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you be diligent in your study of Holy Scripture and in your use of the means of grace?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you pray for God's people and lead them by your own example in faithful service and holy living?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Will you accept and submit to ecclesiastical discipline should you become delinquent in either life or doctrine and do you promise if at any time you find yourself out of accord with values or core beliefs of the Kingdom Network that you will on your own initiative, make known to the elders of this church the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

For the office of elder:

As elders, will you faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully study God's Word, oversee the household of faith, encourage spiritual growth, maintain loving discipline, and provide for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

For the office of deacon:

As deacons, will you faithfully, diligently, and cheerfully manifest Christ's love and care, gather and distribute the offerings of God's people, visit and comfort the distressed, minister to the poor and needy, and strive to advance God's reign of justice and peace?

**I will, and I ask God to help me.**

Congregational Response:

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, do you receive in the name of the Lord, these deacons and elders as duly elected and ordained servants of Christ?

**We do.**

Do you promise to respect them for the sake of the offices for which they have been chosen and ordained?

**We do.**

Do you promise to encourage and pray for them, to labor together in obedience to the gospel for the unity, purity, and peace of the church, the welfare of the whole world, and the honor of our Lord Jesus Christ?

**We do.**

Following these questions there shall be a time of prayer and laying on of hands, after which there is an official proclamation of the ordination as an elder or deacon.