

First Byron CRC Elder Covenant

We believe it to be the will of God for our local church to be an instrument of Biblical and confessional leadership, as well as preserving sound doctrine and life (*1 Timothy 4:16; Romans 16:17*). We seek to affirm our belief in the Word of God and the historic Reformed faith as expressed in the three forms of unity in the CRC—Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort. This covenant is simply a reaffirmation of beliefs we have long held to, but are important to periodically reaffirm due to changing times. Therefore, we affirm this testimony concerning the following.

I. THE WORD OF GOD

A. Foundation of Our Faith and Practice

WE AFFIRM:

1. That the foundation for all the church believes and teaches both in faith and practice is the infallible and inerrant written Word of God—the Holy Scriptures both of the Old and New Testaments.
2. That the Scriptures possess absolute authority and that the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity, our confessions, possess authority subordinate to the Scriptures in our churches.
3. That the Holy Spirit will lead, guide, and direct His church consistent with His Word. (*John 17:17; Matthew 4:4; 5:17-20; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Hebrews 4:12; Psalm 119:103; Belgic Confession Articles 2,3,5,7,29*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To preach and teach the whole counsel of the Word of God as our fundamental duty; to make, nurture, and equip disciples of Jesus Christ, and to obey the Great Commission joyfully.
2. To live according to the Word of God in all of life.
3. To submit to the final authority of the Word of God.

B. The Inerrancy of Scripture

WE AFFIRM:

1. That the Scripture is the written Word of God. Since God does not lie nor does He make mistakes, His Word cannot contain error. Scripture is inerrant and authoritative. "Scripture in its whole extent and in all parts is the infallible and inerrant Word of God" (*Acts of Synod 1979, p. 127*).
2. That Scripture's primary subject is the glory of God whose central theme is the message of redemption. Since Scripture's authority extends to all that it actually teaches, all of Scripture's subject matter is God's Word and is always true. When Scripture speaks concerning matters of history, science, ethics, or anything else, it is true and authoritative, and it governs our thinking in these areas.

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To teach diligently and defend faithfully the Word of God as infallible and inerrant.
2. To believe and teach all that the Word of God teaches, accenting the primary message of Scripture that there is redemption for us from sin only through Jesus Christ.
3. To preach the law as a teacher of sin and rule of gratitude (*Romans 7:7; John 14:15; 1 John 5:1-5*).

II. THE CHURCH OF GOD

A. Its Savior

WE AFFIRM:

1. That the redemptive work of Jesus Christ was unique and He remains the only way of salvation—our only comfort in life and death.
2. That we are made right with God by grace alone through faith alone on account of Christ alone. (*Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 14:6; 2 Timothy 1:8-12; Hebrews 10:11-14; Romans 3:1,2,9-12; 8:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-10; Belgic Confession Articles 20,21,22,23,26*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To exalt the Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to whom the name above all names and all authority in heaven and earth has been given.
2. To proclaim this gospel of Christ to our world as the only answer to mankind's sin, rebellion, and separation from God.

B. Its Worship

WE AFFIRM:

The elements in the worship of the church and the content of these activities must be done for the glory of God as prescribed by the Word of God. (*Exodus 20:4; Deuteronomy 5:8-10; Leviticus 10:1-7; 1 Samuel 15:22,23; John 4:23, 24; Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 96; Belgic Confession Article 32*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

To promote worship that brings glory to God and is consistent with His Word, as the author of Hebrews says, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe (*Hebrews 12:28*).

C. Its Offices

WE AFFIRM:

1. That men and women equally bear the image of God and are to serve Him with all their gifts according to His specific callings to them in biblical, complimentary roles and responsibilities.
2. That from creation, men were given authority for leadership in the family and in the church.
3. That God has appointed men to serve in the authoritative offices of the church.
4. That the purpose of the spiritual gifts given to men and women in Christ is not self-fulfillment but service to others—all to God's glory.
5. That Christ rules His church through the officers He calls to govern it according to the regulations of His Word (*1 Timothy 2&3; Titus 1; 1 Corinthians 14; Belgic Confession Articles 30,31; Acts of Synod 1994, pp. 505-508; 513-516*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To develop and use the gifts and abilities of all of God's people—men, women, and youth—in accord with the Word of God and for the good of God's kingdom and people.

2. To repent of all pride, bigotry or chauvinism, which has kept us from properly using people's gifts.
3. To preserve the holiness and authority of the offices of the church in accord with the Word of God.

D. The Sacraments

WE AFFIRM:

1. That Christ has instituted two sacraments for His church, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, so that by our faithful use of them He might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel and put His seal on that promise.
2. That Baptism should be given to believers and their children in keeping with God's gracious and covenantal dealings with sinners saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. (*Genesis 17; Romans 4:9-11; Galatians 3:26-29; Isaiah 44:1-3; Acts 2:38,39; Acts 10:47; Acts 16:31; Colossians 2:11; 1 Corinthians 10:1,2; 1 Corinthians 7:14; Matthew 28:18-21*).
3. That the Lord's Supper should be observed frequently by all those who have publicly professed their faith in Jesus Christ as the only One who can save them from their sins; showing that they are truly sorry for their sins and earnestly desire to lead a godly, holy life in Christ, and having properly examined themselves, their faith, hope and love for God and neighbor as revealed in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29.

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To faithfully administer the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
2. To doing all that we can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to teach covenant children and others the meaning of their baptism, the privileges and responsibilities of covenant life with God, and the necessity of giving their lives to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
3. To discern age - and ability - appropriate faith through the process of public profession of faith under the direction and encouragement of the elders. (Church Order, art. 59a)
4. To encourage repentant sinners who trust in Jesus Christ alone for forgiveness and righteousness to come gladly to the table of our Lord.
5. To warn any unrepentant sinner and those who willfully continue in sin and/or unbelief, to keep themselves from the table of the Lord until they are first reconciled to God through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.

E. Its Unity

WE AFFIRM:

1. That the church is the universal body of Christ. The basis of its unity is not a denominational name, ethnicity, or similarity of background, but solely unity of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. That God's people are accountable to admonish and encourage one another, according to the Word of God.
3. That each church seeks ecclesiastical fellowship and union with other churches who faithfully adhere to the Word of God.
4. That, though the local church comes primarily under the authority of the local elders, the rulers of each church are also accountable through broader assemblies to other elders who live and rule in accord with God's Word. (*Ephesians 2:11-22; 4:1-16; Acts 15; 1 Corinthians 5-6:11; 11:17-34; 12:12-31; Belgic Confession Articles 27,28,29*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To demonstrate openly that we are part of the body of Christ by a pure and holy lifestyle, by our words and deeds, by being and sending missionaries of the gospel, and by seeking unity with believers everywhere who faithfully adhere to God's Word.
2. To submit ourselves to one another out of reverence to Christ and before His Word, and to hold one another accountable to live, act, teach and minister in accordance with that Word.
3. To seek, where possible, ecclesiastical fellowship and union with all who believe and faithfully adhere to the Word of God and Reformed Confessions.
4. To pray for the unity of the church and its faithfulness to the Word of God throughout the world.
5. To the principle expressed in Church Order Article 85: "No church shall in any way lord it over another church, and no office-bearer shall lord it over another office-bearer."

III. THE LIFE OF GOD'S PEOPLE

A. The Great Commission

WE AFFIRM:

1. That it is a fundamental duty of God's people to strive to make and nurture disciples for Jesus Christ in joyful adherence to the Great Commission.
2. That the task of fulfilling the Great Commission can only be done effectively in our community and world if we stand firmly on the teachings of the Scriptures and are engaged in being Christ's witnesses.
3. That faithfulness in fulfilling this Great Commission is not dependent on marketing methods or techniques which minimize biblical standards for worship and evangelism. (*Matthew 10:32,33; 28:16-20; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Timothy 2:12; 1 Peter 2:1-12; 3:15; Acts 1:8; Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 54*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To fulfill the Great Commission by repenting of our failure to adequately be Christ's witnesses and by making His Commission a priority in the life of the church and its members.
2. To fulfill this Great Commission by training and equipping ourselves and others to accomplish this task.
3. To pray fervently and compassionately for our lost world and neighbors.
4. To employ methods for outreach which conform to Scripture and the Reformed Confessions.

B. The Christian Life

WE AFFIRM:

1. That Jesus Christ is the Lord of all of life, not simply of a particular aspect of the Christian's life.
2. That every part of our hearts and lives must be brought into conformity to the Word of God.
3. That no part of life is spiritually neutral, but that Christ is the covenant Head and Lord of every Christian endeavor.
4. That the Christian life begins with Christ's gift of regeneration; that we embrace this life by repentance and faith as our response to the gospel; that this repentance and faith will characterize the Christian throughout this life, enabling us to submit our lives to Christ. (*Ephesians 1:15-23; 4:1-6; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 10:31; Matthew 5; 6:10; John 3:1-21; Belgic Confession Article 29*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To acknowledge Christ's exalted position as Lord and to humble ourselves before Him by obeying His Word in every aspect of daily life.
2. To honor Christ as Lord, covenant head, and King by educating our children (whenever possible) from a specifically Christian perspective; by living as families and individuals, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, men and women, children and young adults in obedience to God's Word; and by using our gifts and abilities to fulfill our callings in society—all to the glory of God.
3. To live a holy lifestyle of thanksgiving in accordance with God's Word.
4. To proclaim the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior from ongoing sin and the only enabler in our commitment to His lordship.

IV. **CRITICAL MORAL / ETHICAL ISSUES AND CONTROVERSIES FACING THE CHURCH TODAY.**

A. **Genesis 1-11**

WE AFFIRM:

1. Genesis Chapters 1-11 are not mythical, poetic, allegorical, metaphorical, or symbolic, but are to be read as the accurate literal history of the original perfect creation of the world, the fall into the first sin, the first Gospel promise, and the worldwide flood.
2. God supernaturally created the universe in six literal 24-hour days without using any naturalistic or evolutionary process (*Ex. 20:8-11; Rom. 1:20; 2 Pet. 3:5; Heb. 11:3*).
3. Adam and Eve were literal historical people created perfect by God in his image (*Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 15:45*), both body and soul, as the first man and woman (*Gen. 2:7; 21-22; Matt. 19:4-6; Mark 10:6; Acts 17:26; 1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13-14*).
4. Sin, suffering, and death first entered the world and the human race through the sin of our first parents (*Genesis 3:1-7; 1 Cor. 15:21-22*) and that original sin was imputed to all those descended ordinarily from them, together with its consequences (*Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 5:12; 8:19-23*).
5. The Bible teaches that just as Adam's sin was imputed to us, so Christ's righteousness is imputed to believers (*Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To boldly proclaim these truths despite hostile opposition in the culture and even in some churches.
2. To show how important these truths are for:
 - a. Biblical definitions of what constitutes a man or a woman and of marriage as between one man and one woman
 - b. The doctrine of imputation of Adam's sin to us, and therefore also of Christ's righteousness to believers.
 - c. The doctrine of Christ's perfection in his teaching given he quotes these chapters as historical in his teaching.
3. To establish our children and youth in these truths, and equip them to promote and defend them in the face of opposition.

B. **Marriage** ¹

¹ These sections include material taken in part from Statements 1, 2, 3, and 5 of Twelve Statements from the Presbyterian Church of America's Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality report, May 2020.

WE AFFIRM:

1. That marriage is to be between one man and one woman (*Gen. 2:18-25; Matt. 19:4-6*)
2. That sexual intimacy is a gift from God to be cherished and is reserved for the marriage relationship between one man and one woman (*Prov. 5:18-19*)
3. That marriage was instituted by God for the mutual help and blessing of husband and wife, for procreation and the raising together of godly children, and to prevent sexual immorality (*Gen. 1:28; 2:18; Mal. 2:14-15; I Cor. 7:2, 9*)
4. That marriage is also a God-ordained picture of the differentiated relationship between Christ and the Church (*Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:6-10*)
5. That all other forms of sexual intimacy, including all forms of lust, extramarital sex, pornography, and same-sex activity of any kind, are sinful (*Lev. 18:22, 20:13; Rom 1:18-32; I Cor. 6:9; I Tim. 1:10; Jude 7*)
6. We acknowledge that sexual intimacy in marriage does not automatically eliminate unwanted sexual desires, and confess we all stand in need of God's grace for sexual sin and temptation, whether married or not.

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To a call for repentance from sexual sins and temptation. There is no sin so small it does not deserve damnation, and no sin so big it cannot be forgiven (*WCF 15.4*). There is hope and forgiveness for all who repent of their sin and put their trust in Christ (*Matt. 11: 28-30; John 6: 35, 37; Acts 2: 37-38; 16: 30-31*)

C. Image of God¹

WE AFFIRM:

1. That God created human beings in His image as male and female (*Gen. 1:26-27*)
2. We recognize the goodness of the human body (*Gen. 1:31; John 1:14*) and the call to glorify God with our bodies (*I Cor. 6: 12-20*)
3. That as a God of order and design, God opposes the confusion of man as woman and woman as man (*I Cor. 11: 14-15*)

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To minister compassionately to those who are sincerely confused and disturbed by their internal sense of gender identity. While situations involving such confusion can be heartbreaking and complex, men and women should be helped to live in accordance with their biological sex.

D. Sin¹

WE AFFIRM:

1. That from the sin of our first parents we have received an inherited guilt and an inherited depravity (*Rom. 5: 12-19; Eph. 2: 1-3*). From this original corruption proceed all actual transgressions.
2. That every sin, original and actual, deserves death and renders us liable to the wrath of God (*Rom. 3:23; James 2:10*)
3. That impure thoughts and desires arising in us prior to and apart from a conscious act of the will are still sin. Those desires within us are not mere weaknesses or inclinations to sin but are themselves idolatrous and sinful.

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To repent of our sin, for each of us to grieve for our sin, hate our sin, turn from our sin to God, and endeavor to walk with God in obedience to His commandments.
2. To challenge and encourage those entrusted to our care to flee from sin and temptation, to run to God and His grace, to follow His leading in our lives, and to seek to honor Him every day of our earthly walk.

E. Sexuality

WE AFFIRM:²

1. That heterosexuality is God's revealed will for humankind and that such relationships must be chaste, whether married or single.
2. That homosexual or transgender desires and actions in any context are a result of the fall, reflect the brokenness of our sinful world, and must be resisted.
3. That, like all sinners, those who give into such desires and actions must be clearly called to repentance and faith.
4. That the pardon and power in God's grace enables followers of Jesus to put to death sinful desires and to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.
5. That self-conception as male or female should be defined by God's holy purposes in creation and redemption as revealed in Scripture and therefore adopting a homosexual or transgender self-conception is inconsistent with God's holy purposes in creation and redemption.
6. That the grace of God in Christ enables sinners to forsake same-sex attraction and transgender self-conceptions and by God's grace to accept the God-ordained link between one's biological sex and one's self-conception as male or female.
7. That the church acts contrary to love for God and its neighbor when it declares morally good or neutral anything which God has declared sinful. Such actions only endanger people and dishonor God.

The following Scripture passages apply to this section: *Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15-25; 3:1-24; 19; Ex. 20:14; 20:17; Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Dt. 5:18, 21; 22:5; Jdg. 19:22; 2 Sam. 11:1-12:15; Job 31:1; Ps. 51:1-19; Prov. 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; Isa. 59:1; Mal. 2:14; Matt. 5:27-30; 19:4-6, 8-9, 12; Acts 15:20, 29; Rom. 1:26-27; 1:32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11, 18-20; 7:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 5:24; Eph. 4:15, 20-24; 5:31-32; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3-8; 1 Tim. 1:9-10, 15; 2 Tim. 2:22; Titus 2:11-12; Heb. 13:4; Jas. 1:14-15; 1 Pet. 2:11; Jude 7*

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

² This section includes slightly edited version of Articles 7, 12 & 13 of the Nashville Statement.
<https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/>

1. To provide loving support, patient encouragement, and care for those struggling against homosexual or transgender temptations and identities and to help them to seek forgiveness, grace and healing to overcome these and embrace only the identity God offers in Christ.
2. To reach out in love to those touched by homosexuality, gender dysphoria, and those who contend biblically against their sexual temptations. They should be patiently assisted in their battle, not ostracized or disdained.
3. To make the church a source of help in the battle against all improper sexual thoughts, actions, or identities.

F. Language for God

WE AFFIRM:

1. That God alone has the sole right and authority to tell us how He ought to be addressed by His church.
2. That persons of the Trinity receive masculine reference in the Scriptures, not as a result of a cultural bias of a previous age, but because this is how God chooses to reveal and characterize Himself (*Matthew 6:9; Luke 1:34,35; John 4:23,24; Matthew 3:16-17*).

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To uphold the full revelation of God and to seek to understand carefully all that He has revealed about Himself in the Scriptures, including His character, His attributes and His names.
2. To be mindful, honoring and respectful of the way God has characterized Himself in His Word in our prayers, writings, speech, teaching, preaching and educational material.

G. Sanctity of Life

WE AFFIRM:

1. That God's gift to us of human life is so precious in God's sight that He is the only one who may decide when human life shall end.
2. That the unborn child, from conception, is a human being in the image of God.

WE COMMIT OURSELVES:

1. To uphold and honor life, which God created, in all stages from conception onward.
2. To minister to those suffering the effects of the evil of abortion, including abortive mothers, fathers and medical staff.
3. To seek to provide support and encouragement for orphans and parents who choose life.
4. To honor the disabled, infirmed and elderly.

The Spirit of this Covenant ³

1. We do not believe that all things in this elder covenant are of equal weight, some being more essential, some less. We do not believe that every part of this covenant must be believed in order for one to be saved.
2. Our aim is to embrace and teach the whole counsel of God and to encourage an adherence to biblical truth. We believe biblical truth stabilizes the church against every wind of doctrine and promotes God's glory.

³ These four points are adapted from the Bethlehem Baptist Elder Affirmation of Faith—Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis MN.

3. We believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries.
4. We do not claim infallibility for this covenant and are open to refinement and correction from Scripture. Yet we hold firmly to these truths as we see in them and call on others to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so.

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