

Constitution of Trinity Reformed Baptist Church, Hamilton Incorporated

(As amended February 1994; August 2002; March 2014; June 2016; July 2016)

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Preamble

We, the members of Trinity Reformed Baptist Church, Hamilton Incorporated, hereby establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

Article 1: name

The name of this church shall be Trinity Reformed Baptist Church, Hamilton Incorporated.

Article 2: purpose

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Holy Scriptures in promoting and maintaining His worship, evangelising and edifying the saints, primarily in New Zealand. It may at times also involve itself in such matters overseas through contact with other like-minded brethren.

Therefore we are committed to the proclamation of God's perfect Law and of the glorious gospel of His grace throughout all the world and to the defence of "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

Article 3: church government

Section 1: general statement

The church acknowledges our Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme head of the church, undertakes to manage all its affairs according to New Testament teaching, and recognises the ultimate authority of the Holy Scriptures in all matters of faith and practice.

Section 2: execution of governance

The Church is governed according to the principle of elder rule with congregational consent. The purpose of this is to ensure that the Church is administered efficiently by the office-bearers, and with the confidence of the congregation. Subsequently, we repudiate either:

1. Administration of the Church by the office-bearers in such a way that their decisions are broadly unaccountable to the congregation;

2. Administration of the Church by the congregation in such a way that their decisions broadly nullify the autonomy of the office-bearers.

In practice, this principle of governance is preserved by the following balance of obligations:

- Office-bearers are obliged to preserve the trust of the congregation, especially by recognizing when a decision is sufficiently weighty to solicit a congregational vote;
- Members of the congregation are obliged to preserve their trust in the office-bearers by recognizing that the full reasons for decisions may not always be disclosed, especially when doing so could cause harm, or when decisions require specialised knowledge.
- Office-bearers and members of the congregation who are confident they have sufficient reason to question a decision are obliged to do so, first with the eldership, or failing that, with the congregation via a special church meeting.

Article 4: statement of faith

The church adopts as the fullest expression of our faith the London Confession of Faith of 1689 in its modern language text (“A Faith to Confess,” 1975: Carey Publications Ltd).

The ultimate authority in all matters of faith, order and morals is, and must be, the Bible alone. This truth is clearly set forth in the opening article of the Confession itself. This historic document is, however, an excellent summary of “the things most surely believed among us,” and we find it to be an assistance in controversy, a confirmation of faith and a means of edification in righteousness.

Article 5: membership

Section 1: requirements for membership

5:1:1 Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith in the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who manifests a life transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, who has been baptised upon the profession of their faith, who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines (refer Article 4) and aims of this church, and who is willing to submit to its government and discipline, shall be eligible for membership.

Section 2: reception into membership

5:2:1 A person desiring to become a member may apply to the elders and request an interview. During the interview the elders will seek to determine whether that person complies with the requirements of Article 5, Section 1.

5:2:2 Any applicant for membership must not be a current member of another church. If the applicant has been a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine the person's standing in that church and their reasons for resigning. At the discretion of the elders, a letter may be sent to that church before the application is considered.

5:2:3 If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership, they shall recommend that the applicant be accepted into membership at a church business meeting. Such recommendation shall be notified to the church at least two Sundays before the business meeting. During this period objections may be raised by any member concerning the applicant's manner of life or doctrine. The elders shall investigate any objections that, in their judgement, are sufficiently serious. When an application has been accepted by the vote of a business meeting the new member shall be publicly welcomed into membership at a meeting of the church. Normally this will be at the next meeting held for the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Section 3: types of membership

5:3:1 Each member of the church is acknowledged to form a vital part of the body and to have a peculiar function in the life of that body (1 Cor 12:14-27). Practical considerations,

however, require that certain distinctions be recognised in the membership of this church.

5:3:2 Regular Members

All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedure set forth in Section 2 of this Article, who continue in regular attendance at the stated meetings of the church, and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church as set forth in Article 6, shall be considered regular members in good standing and be entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church.

5:3:3 Associate Members

A person who qualifies for regular membership in every respect and who respects this church's doctrinal position on baptism but who holds to paedobaptism shall be considered an associate member. Such a member shall be able to vote in members' meetings on any matter with the exceptions of a vote to amend this constitution, to appoint an elder, and to call a pastor. He/she shall not be able to hold the office of elder.

5:3:4 Distance members

Regular members who move away from our area, and who cannot find another local church with which they can conscientiously unite, will at their request be retained as associate members of this church. Such persons must maintain regular communication with the church in order to maintain their associate membership in it. Nevertheless, they are urged to seek diligently a church with which they can unite elsewhere. A distance member shall not be allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church. Where contact has not been maintained for a period of twelve months the distance member shall be contacted, if possible, by at least one of the elders. If such a member indicates no interest in retaining their distance membership they shall be removed from the distance membership roll at the next church business meeting upon the recommendation of the elders.

Section 4: termination of membership

5:4:1 By physical death.

5:4:2 By transfer. When so requested, the elders may grant a departing member in good standing a letter of dismissal to another church.

5:4:3 By removal from membership (refer Article 6: church discipline).

5:4:4 By non-attendance. A regular member who fails to attend services of the church for a period of six months without being providentially hindered shall, if possible, be interviewed by at least one elder. If such member indicates no interest in resuming attendance they shall be removed from membership at the next church business meeting upon the recommendation of the elders.

5:4:4 By resignation.

Section 5: expectation of members

5:5:1 Regular attendance at church meetings, unless providentially hindered.

Meetings included are:

1. Worship on the Lord's Day.
2. Church business meetings.

5:5:2 The church expects its members to make use of the various means of grace that are available to them, such as regular daily Bible reading, regular private and family prayer, and the regular gathering together of the Lord's people on the Lord's Day.

5:5.3 Regular financial support of the work of the Lord by the church through systematic and proportionate giving according to one's means (Mal 3:10; 1 Cor 16:1,2; 2 Cor 8 and 9).

5:5:4 Scriptural concern for the well-being of the local body of believers and the mutual encouragement of the individuals which make up that body (1 Cor12:12-27; Eph 4:4,11-16).

5:5:5 Corporately and individually to labour for the extension of God's Kingdom, both at home and to the ends of the earth.

5:5:6 The rendering of loyal obedience to all the moral precepts of God's Word in ones daily life (Rom 8:3,4; 1 Cor 9:20,21; James 2:12).

5:5:7 Recognition of and submission to the recognised elders of the church (1 Cor 16:15,16; 1 Thess 5:12,13; Heb 13:17).

Article 6: church discipline

Section 1: formative discipline

Every disciple (follower) of Christ must be under His discipline (instruction and correction) which is administered to each one through the church (1 Cor 12:12- 27). Mutual submission to one another and to the elders whom the Lord has set over His church (Eph 5:21, 1 Peter 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively.

Failure to respond to formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

Section 2: corrective discipline

6:2:1 general statement

Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In all such cases reasonable efforts must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error and remove offence through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Gal 6:1; James 5:19,20). The principles of Matt 18:15-16 and 1 Cor 5:1-13 must be carefully followed in all cases of corrective discipline. When admonition is not heeded, suspension of some of the privileges of membership may need to be imposed, and if this measure fails, removal from membership may be necessary.

6:2:2 suspension of privileges

Any conduct on the part of a member which disturbs the peace of the church or prejudices its testimony may require that the elders suspend the member from participating in certain activities of the church, according to the gravity of the offence. A suspension shall be announced to the members by the elders and shall remain in force until the suspended member gives evidence of true repentance and change of conduct. When a suspended member can be restored to full fellowship this also shall be announced to the members by the elders (Luke 15:10; James 5:19,20). Although a person under suspension is considered to be walking disorderly, they must still be regarded as a brother or sister member and not as one cut off from the church.

6:2:3 removal from membership

6:2:3:1 Some types of conduct must be categorised as “immoral” (1 Cor 5:9-11, 6:9,10; Gal 5:19-21) and a member guilty of such conduct must be cut off from the fellowship of the church (1 Cor 5:3-5,13; Matt 18:15-20). In such a case the elders shall make earnest efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation, but if these efforts fail, they shall report the same to the members at a regular or specially called business meeting of the church and recommend that the offender be removed from membership, which must be done according to Scripture (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 5:4) by the action of the entire church membership. To be valid, an act of removal from membership must have the approval of at least three quarters of the members present and voting.

6:2:3:2 Likewise, some wrong opinions regarding the doctrines of Scripture are so serious that they must be categorised as “heretical” (Gal:6-9; 1 Tim 4:1), and a member who persists in propagating or holding any such opinion, in spite of earnest and patient admonition by the elders, shall be removed from membership in the same manner as an immoral person.

6:2:3:3 Circumstances may arise where a member may personally request their exclusion from the church membership. For example, a member may genuinely believe themselves not to be saved, or may change their theological views so as to be unable to agree with this constitution. In such cases, after due admonition and/or counselling from the elders, the member may be graciously removed from membership by the

church at a business meeting of church members upon the recommendation of the elders.

Section 3: restoration

The purpose of church discipline is to restore a fallen brother or sister in love and to keep the church pure. Therefore, it is the duty of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a suspended or removed member who gives satisfactory evidence of their repentance (2 Cor 2:6-10). This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church by a majority of the members present upon the recommendation of the elders.

Article 7: ordinances

Section 1: general statement

There are two ordinances of special significance which our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Neither of them has saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of baptism or the bread and cup of the supper. These ordinances are not means of "special grace" but they are "special means of grace" and powerful aids to the faith of the believers who participate in them.

For detailed understanding of the ordinances, refer The Confession, chapters 28-30, pages 61-64.

Article 8: office-bearers

Section 1: elders

8:1:1 Those who have been called of God to lead, rule (guide), preach and teach in the church are called elders, pastors or bishops. These are three interchangeable names designating one and the same office in the New Testament church (Acts 20:17,28; Eph 4:11,12; Titus 1:5,7).

8:1:2 Any man desiring the office of an elder must evidence to God's people the personal, domestic and ministerial qualifications that are set forth in the Scriptures (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

8:1:3 Elders must seek to discharge their duties set forth in the Scriptures (particularly Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Heb 13:17).

8:1:4 While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the other members of the church (1 Tim 5:19,20).

8:1:5 Every elder has equal rule in the church, though gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from elder to elder. Elders will be maintained in material necessities and disentangled from the cares of another vocation according to their gifts, the needs and capacity of the church and the direction of Christ, her head (1 Tim 5:17,18).

8:1:6 Though a plurality of elders is the New Testament norm for every church, the New Testament does not specify the number of elders each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an elder's term of office. One truly called to this office is usually called to it for life. Only when an elder fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from continuing as an elder. An elder may honourably resign from his office for a time if he feels he is providentially hindered from properly discharging his pastoral responsibilities. He may at the discretion of the elders, and without re-examination by the members, re-assume the office when these providential hindrances have been removed.

8:1:7 Any man called to this office must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's Confession and Constitution. If he should at any time move from this position, he would be under spiritual and moral obligation to immediately make that fact known to the church in an orderly manner.

Section 2: deacons

8:2:1 Deacons are responsible primarily to administer the benevolent concerns of the church as well as its business affairs (Acts 6:1-4). They must fulfil the duties of their office in co-operation with, and in submission to, the elders.

8:2:2 The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall choose (refer Article 8, 8:4:1:1) as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having the scriptural qualifications for that office, particularly those set forth in Acts 6:3; 1 Tim 3:8-13.

8:2:3 The elders and deacons will, if expedient and practical, elect men from the deacons to the positions of church secretary and church treasurer. However, it is recognised that the church is not obliged by Scripture to have these offices and, therefore, it should not be mandatory that they be filled by deacons. If it is considered by the elders and deacons that these positions would be better served from among the church membership at large, then the provisions of Article 9 will apply.

Section 3: appointment of office-bearers—general statement

The local church membership, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is responsible to appoint men to the offices of elder and deacon. Each individual involved should have an inward conviction that the Lord is calling him to a particular office, and the church should recognise that call as it observes in the individual evidence of the gifts and graces which Scripture requires for that particular office. This is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayerful waiting on God for guidance and careful perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a dispassionate evaluation of each man nominated to a particular office. These activities are the responsibility of each individual member of the church as well as of the church as a whole.

Section 4: procedure of appointment for elders and deacons

8:4:1 nominations

8:4:1:1 Three or more members of good standing in the church may submit to the elders, for consideration for nomination, the name of a man they consider scripturally qualified for one of these offices. This submission is to be in writing and signed by the man under

consideration and the nominators. After earnest prayer and careful consideration of all potential office-bearers, the elders shall nominate as many or as few men as they see fit.

8:4:1:2 Submission of names for consideration by the eldership must be made no less than four weeks prior to the annual business meeting. The names of those put forward by the elders for nomination shall be posted on the notice board two weeks prior to the annual business meeting to allow the people of God to pray specifically for God's appointments to be made.

8:4:1:3 The elders may at any time during the year nominate a candidate or candidates to either or both offices and call a special church business meeting for their consideration. In no case may a man be nominated to either office without his prior knowledge or consent.

8:4:2 elections and reaffirmation

When the time comes to consider a nomination for election, or a reaffirmation of confidence (refer Article 8, 8:5:1) during a business meeting of the church, the elders shall invite two of those members who originally submitted the candidate's name to testify as to their reason for doing so. The candidate's qualifications may then be openly discussed by those members present in the fear of God and the light of Scripture. After that a secret ballot shall be taken. It is hoped that the vote of the membership will in such matters always be unanimous, but if unanimity is not realised, no less than a three-quarters' majority of the members present and voting shall be required for the election or reaffirmation of an office-bearer.

Abstentions are to be treated as a decision to not vote and therefore are disregarded in the counting of votes, but may be noted. If a quorum of yes and no votes is not achieved, the motion cannot carry.

8:4:3 ordination

Following the recognition of an office-bearer by vote of the membership, he shall be publicly installed in his office at a regular worship service by the prayer of the whole church (Acts 13:1-3) and the laying on of the hands of the existing elders (1 Tim 4:14).

Section 5: review of office-bearers

8:5:1 Office-bearers are subject to the same rules of discipline as are other members of the church. Elders hold office as long as they are faithful to their calling and have the confidence of the membership. The church shall reaffirm (or express the withdrawal of) its confidence in each of its elders at its annual meeting four years following the date of his installation and every fourth year thereafter in the manner designated in 8:4:2 'Elections and reaffirmation' above. Deacons will be eligible for re-election every two years at the annual meeting. An elder or deacon may, however, resign his office without prejudice if for good and valid reasons he finds he can no longer discharge the duties required of that office.

8:5:2 There may arise reasons that would require an office-bearer to be reviewed before the regularly scheduled time. Such a review meeting may be called by a unanimous decision of the elders (or the other elders in the case of an elder). The members may also request such a meeting. This request must be set forth in writing with the signature of one third of the members in good standing. It must be presented to the elders, who shall in turn make the proper announcement of the meeting. The procedure of such a meeting is outlined in 8:4:2 'Elections and reaffirmation' above.

Article 9: administrative and teaching positions

Section 1: administrative positions of church secretary and church treasurer

9:1:1 As stated in Article 8, Section 2, the church is not obliged by Scripture to have these offices for the efficient administration of the church's worldly affairs. Therefore, it is not mandatory that they be filled by deacons. If these positions are to be filled from the membership at large, then this article shall dictate the procedures to be adopted.

9:1:2 The nominations and elections for these positions will follow the same procedure as laid down for office-bearers in Article 8, Sections 8:4:1 and 8:4:2. The review of such positions will follow the same procedure as laid down for deacons in Article 8, Section 5.

9:1:3 The secretary and treasurer shall act in co-operation with, and in submission to, the office-bearers, and shall make presentation to their meetings as requested.

9:1:4 The church secretary shall keep minutes of church business meetings and attend to the secretarial requirements of the church. (Minutes of office-bearers' meetings shall be kept as required by a minute secretary elected from their number.)

9:1:5 The treasurer shall keep such financial records as are required by the law of the land and shall supply financial information to the office-bearers and church from time to time as requested.

Section 2: teaching positions

9:2:1 Definition: Teaching positions shall include the following:

1. Sunday school and Bible class teachers
2. Church Bible study leaders
3. Preachers

9:2:2 Persons holding these positions must be church members or adherents in good standing.

9:2:3 Recommendations for any of these positions must be approved by the elders.

9:2:4 Notwithstanding any other provision in this section, the elders may at their discretion invite recognised visiting preachers to address the church.

Section 3: marriage celebrants

The church encourages one or more of its elders to apply to the New Zealand government to be recognized as a Marriage Celebrant for the purpose of conducting weddings for

church members, adherents and members of the community. Trinity Reformed Baptist Church affirms the biblical principle of marriage as the union of one man and one woman. This Church is opposed, as a matter of biblical principle, to any form of marriage other than between one man and one woman and is opposed to the use of its facilities for any wedding that does not meet this criterion.

Article 10: business meetings

Section 1: general statement

There shall be an annual business meeting of the church membership for the presentation of reports, election and reaffirmation of officers, and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the meeting. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

Section 2: notice of meetings

10:2:1 Notice of all business meetings shall be given at regular worship services on two successive Lord's Days immediately prior to the meeting. Notice shall include items of business to be discussed.

10:2:2 Meetings for the presentation of special reports or for seeking the counsel of the members may be called on shorter notice, but no vote may be taken or other business transacted at such meetings.

Section 3: quorum

10:3:1 All members should attend the meetings of the church; however, a quorum shall consist of not less than 50% of the voting membership.

10:3:2 If a quorum is not obtained, those present have the power to call a subsequent meeting no sooner than two successive Lord's Days after the date of the original meeting. Should a quorum not be obtained at the subsequent meeting, business set down for the previous meeting may be transacted.

Section 4: chairmanship

The elders shall appoint one of their number, or a member in good standing, to preside over the meeting.

Section 5: voting

10:5:1 All regular members who have reached the age of eighteen years and are in good standing in the church may vote on any question properly brought before the membership.

10:5:2 Unanimity of heart and mind under God shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realised, a simple majority (51%) of the members present and voting shall be required to make a resolution valid, except where the proportionate vote is otherwise specified within this Constitution.

10:5:3 Voting, when required, shall be by show of hands, except where otherwise specified within this Constitution, or when the chairman of the meeting considers a matter would be better served by secret ballot.

Article 11: dissolution

The Church may be wound up voluntarily if a three quarter majority of the members pass a resolution to do so, and confirm that resolution at a subsequent general meeting called together for that purpose, held not earlier than thirty days after the date on which the resolution so to be confirmed was passed.

Upon dissolution of the Church the elders shall after settlement of the Church's just debts and liabilities dispose of the assets to another organisation with a similar purpose and charitable status, for the benefit of the gospel.

Article 12: trustees

Section 1: composition

The Board of Trustees shall consist of three office-bearers (elected by the elders). Should any trustee cease to hold his office (as held when appointed to the Board), he shall cease to be a trustee.

Section 2: duties

The trustees shall perform such legal and business transactions as are peculiarly designated to them by the laws of our land.

Article 13: borrowing and investments

Section 1: borrowing

The church shall have the power to borrow sums of money on security of its assets, or on overdraft, as may be necessary or expedient for furthering the purpose of the church.

Section 2: investments

The church shall have the power to invest sums of money in any manner deemed necessary or expedient for furthering the purpose of the church.

Section 3: funds sent overseas

Any funds that are sent overseas as outlined in Article 2 will not be provided out of the general fund of the church, but will be provided for by specially designated gifts from the members. These gifts will not attract any taxation benefits.

Section 4: payments to members

Any member may be remunerated for services performed or expenses incurred on behalf of the church. The amount of the remuneration must be reasonable and must not exceed that which would be paid to an arm's length party.

Section 5: general

Investments and borrowing decisions shall be approved at business meetings of the church in accordance with Article 10 of this Constitution.

Article 14: common seal

The common seal of the church shall be kept by the secretary, and shall be affixed to every document requiring it, upon a resolution of the church, in the presence of a trustee, by the secretary who shall sign the documents. A register shall be kept by the secretary noting the date and purpose of each use of the seal.

Article 15: by-laws

Should it become necessary, the elders shall draft and amend from time to time, with the advice and consent of the deacons, such by-laws as they shall deem necessary for the efficient implementation of this Constitution. No by-law that is in violation of any of the terms of this Constitution shall be valid.

Article 16: amendments

Section 1

Any part of this Constitution, with the exception of Articles 2, 4 and Sections 3 and 4 of Article 8 may be amended by a three-quarter majority of the members present and voting at a duly convened business meeting of the church members.

Section 2

No proposed amendment may be voted on which has not been distributed to the members in written form at least four weeks prior to such a meeting.