

# **WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)**

## **THE CONSTITUTION**

### **PREAMBLE**

Jesus Christ is the foundation and head of the Christian church.

It is in Jesus Christ that the Word became flesh and the gospel is embodied.

It is to God in Christ that the holy Scriptures, inspired by the Holy Spirit, bear witness.

It is through Christ that God gives abundant life and spiritual vitality to the members of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The churches in the World Communion of Reformed Churches are called together in the name of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Under the sovereign God, with Christ's followers across the globe, sharing one baptism, the members of the communion belong to the one holy catholic and apostolic church.

### **ARTICLE I – NAME AND SUCCESSION**

The name of this organization shall be World Communion of Reformed Churches. The following constitute the name of the organization in French, German and Spanish:

Communión mondiale d'Églises réformées (CMER)

Weltgemeinschaft Reformierter Kirchen (WRK)

Comunión Mundial de Iglesias Reformadas (CMIR)

The World Communion of Reformed Churches succeeds the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and its antecedents, as a united ecumenical body for Reformed churches.

### **ARTICLE II – BASIS**

The basis of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be the Word of the triune God, incarnate in Jesus Christ and revealed in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is to this triune God that the church bears witness. The World Communion of Reformed Churches is committed to embody a Reformed identity as articulated in the historic Reformed confessions and the Ecumenical Creeds of the early church, and as continued in the life and witness of the Reformed community.

### **ARTICLE III – IDENTITY**

Drawing on the heritage of the Reformed confessions, as a gift for the renewal of the whole church, the World Communion of Reformed Churches is a communion of churches through

- A. Affirming the gifts of unity in Christ through the mutual recognition of baptism and membership, pulpit and table fellowship, ministry and witness.
- B. Interpreting Reformed theology for contemporary Christian witness.
- C. Encouraging the renewal of Reformed worship and spiritual life.
- D. Renewing a commitment to partnership in God's mission, through witness, diaconal service, and work for justice, so as to foster mission in unity, mission renewal, and mission empowerment.
- E. Encouraging leadership development and nurture of the covenant community.
- F. Engaging other ecumenical organizations and churches of other traditions in the ecumenical movement through dialogue and cooperation in ministry.

### **ARTICLE IV - VALUES**

- A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches strives to demonstrate and live the oneness in Christ we profess, to carry out its ministry in ways that enable all member churches to share their gifts, and to honour and be committed to God's saving purposes for the transformation of the world. The World Communion of Reformed Churches serves its members with love and care, encouraging their mutual support and nurture of one another.
- B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches in its order and actions is called to respect, defend, and advance the dignity of every person. In Jesus Christ all human differences must lose their power to divide. No one shall be disadvantaged for, among other reasons, race, ethnicity, or gender, and no individual or church may claim or exercise dominance over another.
- C. The World Communion of Reformed Churches embraces God's covenant promises for the redemption, restoration and renewal of the whole creation through Jesus Christ. In doing so, it affirms the biblical calling of the members to recognize the gift of baptism in one another, and the call to be unified in ministry, and together to bear witness to God's justice and peace and to the integrity of creation.

### **ARTICLE V - MISSION AND PURPOSES**

- A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall assist its member churches by
  - 1. widening and deepening understanding and community among the member churches and helping them to fulfill their own responsibilities in the service of Christ.
  - 2. facilitating the transformation of the member churches into interdependent missional communities that support, empower and challenge each other as partners in the one mission of God.

3. promoting the full and just participation of all members, of all ages, in all aspects of the church's life and its public witness.
  4. promoting the full and just partnership of women and men in church and society.
  5. encouraging and promoting diaconal service in the church and society.
- B. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall also contribute to the ecumenical movement and the transformation of the world by
1. promoting economic and ecological justice, global peace, and reconciliation in the world.
  2. promoting and defending religious, civil, and all other human rights wherever threatened throughout the world.
  3. encouraging and promoting relief and sustainable development in the world and focusing on the eradication of poverty.
  4. providing Reformed perspectives on church unity.

## **ARTICLE VI – MEMBERSHIP**

- A. All current member churches of the Reformed Ecumenical Council and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches shall be members of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. A church that is under suspension in either preceding body at the time of the formation shall remain under suspension in the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. Other churches of the Reformed, Presbyterian, Congregational, Waldensian, other First Reformation, United, and Uniting traditions are eligible for membership, if such a church affirms this constitution.
- C. Member churches are expected to join in achieving the Aims and Purposes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches by, among other things, participating in meetings, taking seriously its actions and decisions, and engaging in its collective work.
- D. Fellowships of churches that affirm a Reformed identity and include in their membership World Communion of Reformed Churches' members are eligible for associate membership. Such associate members shall share in the fellowship and programs of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, participate on a reciprocal basis without a vote in governance, and thereby strengthen the broader Reformed family's participation in the church ecumenical.
- E. An institution established by one or more member churches or whose faith basis and operation are in agreement with that of the historic Reformed confessions are eligible for affiliate membership, without voting privileges.
- F. Membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches does not limit the autonomy of any member church or restrict its relationships with other churches or with other ecumenical organizations.
- G. Members in the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall support the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through an annual financial contribution reflecting the resources and membership of that church. The General Council or the

Executive Committee shall set a minimum contribution requirement for all member churches, associate and affiliate members.

- H. Application for membership shall be made to the office of the General Secretary not later than six months before a General Council meeting. Admission to membership shall be by decision of the Executive Committee following consultation with other member churches in the region. The General Council shall ratify new members by a two-thirds majority of ballots cast. A new member shall not vote on the ratification of its own membership.
- I. A member church may terminate its membership by giving notice in writing to the office of the General Secretary. They will be encouraged to give reasons for this action.
- J. The Executive Committee may suspend the membership of a member church for actions in violation of the Basis, Values, or Aims and Purposes of this constitution or for persistent failure to support or communicate with the organization, subject to the following conditions:
  - 1. Such action may be proposed to the Executive Committee by one or more member churches, after such church or churches have previously presented their concerns to the church in question. A proposal to suspend a member church shall be presented to the Executive Committee at least six months prior to its meeting.
  - 2. The Executive Committee that has received a proposal for suspension shall conduct an investigation. The officers shall develop an investigative process for the specific charges. The process shall be approved by the Executive Committee.
  - 3. The Executive Committee shall take final action only after the church in question has been given sufficient opportunity to defend itself.
  - 4. After such an investigation has been completed, the Executive Committee may decide by a two-thirds vote to suspend the membership of the member in question or refer the case to the next General Council. When an Executive Committee decides suspension, it may be lifted at any subsequent Executive Committee meeting.
  - 5. When a member church is suspended at a General Council meeting, that suspension may be lifted at any subsequent General Council meeting upon recommendation of the then current Executive Committee. The Executive Committee shall, therefore, maintain communication with that member church about the matters related to the cause for suspension.
  - 6. Any member that fails to make membership contributions and does not communicate the reason to the secretariat for three consecutive years shall have the privileges of membership withdrawn by the Executive Committee until the requirements of membership are fulfilled. A member church whose membership privileges are withdrawn shall be considered an inactive member. An inactive member church may attend a General Council meeting as an observer but will not have the right to speak or vote. Inactive members do not qualify for financial support from the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

7. A suspended member may send observers to plenary sessions of the General Council but shall not have the right to vote or address plenary sessions of the General Council except by extraordinary permission of the President. A suspended member shall not have any financial obligations to the World Communion of Reformed Churches during the suspension.

#### **ARTICLE VII - GENERAL COUNCIL**

- A. The General Council is the main governing body of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. The General Council is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when representatives of one-half plus one of its member churches are present to establish a quorum.
- B. The General Council shall
  - 1 provide leadership for the World Communion of Reformed Churches in achieving the aims and purposes of the organization.
  - 2 adopt and amend the Constitution and the Bylaws.
  - 3 make and adopt policies and programmes for the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
  - 4 elect officers and members of the Executive Committee.
  - 5 consider matters brought before it by member churches.
  - 6 ratify decisions of the Executive Committee.
- C. Decisions of the General Council concerning its organization and institutional activities shall be binding.
- D. Decisions of the General Council involving the life and witness of the member churches are advisory in character.

#### **ARTICLE VIII - MEETINGS OF GENERAL COUNCIL**

- A. The General Council shall ordinarily meet once in every seven years.
- B. At the request of at least one-fifth of the member churches, the Executive Committee shall convene the General Council into special session.
- C. The time, place, and programme of a General Council meeting shall be determined by the Executive Committee.
- D. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall adopt rules of procedure for the conduct of its business.

#### **ARTICLE IX - COMPOSITION OF GENERAL COUNCIL**

- A. Participants at the General Council are delegates, associate and affiliate delegates, ecumenical delegates, consultants, observers, guests, and visitors.
- B. Member churches shall be entitled to appoint delegates on the basis of their baptised membership according to the following plan:
  1. two delegates for churches with up to 100,000 members
  2. three delegates for churches with 100,001 to 200,000 members

3. four delegates for churches with 200,001 to 300,000 members
  4. five delegates for churches with 300,001 to 500,000 members
  5. six delegates for churches with 500,001 to 750,000 members
  6. seven delegates for churches with 750,001 to 1,000,000 members
  7. eight delegates for churches with 1,000,001 to 1,500,000 members
  8. nine delegates for churches with 1,500,001 to 2,000,000
  9. ten delegates for churches with more than 2,000,001.
- C. Where a church sends two or more delegates, no more than half shall be ordained ministers, and the delegation shall be gender-balanced. Where a church sends two delegates, at least one shall be a woman. Where a church sends four or more delegates, at least one third of the delegates shall be women and at least one delegate shall be thirty years of age or younger on the date the General Council is convened.
- D. Each of the officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be an ex-officio delegate (with vote) to any General Council that meets during the officer's term of office.
- E. Delegates shall have the right to vote and to move or second a motion in all sessions of the General Council.

#### **ARTICLE X - EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

- A. The Executive Committee shall have twenty-two (22) members elected by the General Council (including six (6) officers). The moderators of Regional Councils shall be members. The General Secretary shall be a member ex-officio (without vote). The Executive Committee is legally constituted to transact the business of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when a majority of its members is present to establish a quorum.
- B. The Executive Committee may invite Executive Secretaries to participate in its meetings in an advisory capacity.
- C. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Committee, an alternate may be appointed under the provisions in the Bylaws.
- D. The Executive Committee shall meet annually.
- E. When the President and the General Secretary deem it necessary to secure a decision of the Executive Committee between its meetings, a vote by mail, email, telephone conference, or other electronic means may be taken. In such cases the required majority (one-half plus one) is based on all the members of the Executive Committee.
- F. The Executive Committee shall:
1. Exercise general oversight of the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council including, but not limited to, the formation of departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

2. Authorize the President and/or the General Secretary to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches between meetings of the General Council. The Executive Committee may, by way of exception and if needed, appoint one or more additional persons to speak for the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
3. Perform all duties specified elsewhere in this Constitution and in the Bylaws or committed to it by the General Council.
4. Approve the annual financial reports and adopt the annual budget.
5. Fill vacancies among the officers and in its own membership, as specified in the Bylaws, which may occur between meetings of the General Council.
6. Elect a General Secretary and appoint Executive Secretaries.
7. Decide on admission to and suspension of membership in the World Communion of Reformed Churches subject to ratification by the next General Council.

## **ARTICLE XI - OFFICERS OF THE WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES**

- A. The General Council shall elect a president and four (4) vice-presidents from among the delegates to the General Council. The General Council shall also elect a General Treasurer. These elected officers shall hold office from the time of their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.
- B. The officers of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall have power to
  1. Approve the agendas for Executive Committee meetings.
  2. Ensure coherence in the interdepartmental work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
  3. Provide advice and direction to the General Secretary.
  4. Report for review to the Executive Committee concerning the actions they have taken.
  5. Oversee the assets of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- C. Any two of the following: the President (or one of the Vice-Presidents if substituting for the President), the General Secretary, and the General Treasurer, are authorised to sign jointly for all legally required registration, opening of bank accounts, and other legal transactions of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.

## **ARTICLE XII - GENERAL SECRETARY**

- A. The General Secretary shall be the chief executive officer of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and shall be responsible to the General Council and to the Executive Committee to direct and coordinate the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. The General Secretary shall serve a term of seven years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another seven-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each seven-year term and prior to the decision to appoint

the General Secretary to a second seven-year term. The performance review is conducted by persons appointed by the Executive Committee.

- C. The General Secretary shall make all necessary arrangements for the convening, reporting, and proper conduct of the General Council.
- D. The General Secretary shall supervise the personnel of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and be responsible for the proper functioning of the secretariat.
- E. All publications shall be under the supervision of the General Secretary.

### **ARTICLE XIII - EXECUTIVE SECRETARIES**

- A. Executive Secretaries shall be appointed for the operations of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. The number of Executive Secretaries serving at any one time, and the scope of their responsibilities, is determined by the Executive Committee upon recommendation of the General Secretary.
- C. Executive Secretaries shall serve a term of five years and shall be eligible for one renewal for another five-year term. A comprehensive performance review will be scheduled at the midpoint of each five-year term and prior to the decision to appoint an Executive Secretary to a second five-year term. The performance review is conducted by the General Secretary.

### **ARTICLE XIV – FINANCE**

- A. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be financed by contributions from member churches, associate and affiliate members, and gifts from individuals, congregations, organizations, and other sources.
- B. The General Treasurer and the General Secretary shall be responsible for the preparation of the annual budget, which shall be presented to the Executive Committee for approval.
- C. The financial accounts of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be audited annually by auditors approved by the Executive Committee. The audited accounts shall be adopted annually by the Executive Committee.

### **ARTICLE XV - DEPARTMENTS, COMMITTEES, OFFICES, AND COMMISSIONS**

- A. The General Council or the Executive Committee may form departments, committees, and commissions to carry out the work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches.
- B. All committees or commissions shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee.
- C. Departments and offices shall be accountable to the General Council and the Executive Committee, through the General Secretary. They shall function in a manner that promotes the coherence of the programmes of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. To this end they are not independent entities but function interdependently.

## **ARTICLE XVI - ORGANIZATION OF REGIONAL COUNCILS**

To promote the closest possible community and cooperation among member churches in a particular area of the world, and the effectiveness of the total work of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the General Council may authorize the organization of a Regional Council composed of the member churches in that defined geographical area. Such a Regional Council shall be accountable to the General Council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches through its appointed administrative structures.

- A. The number, boundaries, and names of the areas shall be determined by the General Council or by the Executive Committee in consultation with the member churches of the region.
- B. The organization of a Regional Council shall be effected by the member churches within the area, in conformity with the Constitution and Bylaws of the World Communion of Reformed Churches. Each Regional Council shall adopt its own Bylaws subject to ratification by the Executive Committee.
- C. Each Regional Council shall meet from time to time within the geographic area, provide for an Administrative Committee, and elect officers pursuant to its Bylaws.
- D. Each Regional Council shall elect a convener or secretary and a treasurer to serve the Regional Council, subject to confirmation by the Executive Committee.

## **ARTICLE XVII - LEGAL STATUS**

The legal status of the World Communion of Reformed Churches shall be that of an international non-governmental, not-for-profit organization. In the event that the World Communion of Reformed Churches ceases to exist as a corporate entity, any remaining assets, after the payment of existing liabilities, shall be distributed pro-rata to the member churches or a successor entity.

## **ARTICLE XVIII - AMENDMENTS**

- A. This Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the delegates in attendance at any meeting of the General Council, provided the proposed amendment has been transmitted to each member church, to members of the Executive Committee, and to the Regional Councils at least six months before it is submitted for approval.
- B. The Bylaws may be amended by a majority vote of the delegates in attendance at a meeting of the General Council, provided notice of at least 24 hours has been given to the delegates attending that meeting.
- C. The Bylaws may also be amended between meetings of the General Council by the Executive Committee. Such changes shall be ratified by the next General Council.

# **WORLD COMMUNION OF REFORMED CHURCHES (WCRC)**

## **THE BYLAWS**

### **I. GENERAL COUNCIL**

- A. The Executive Committee shall serve as the Business Committee of the General Council.
- B. The President, with the advice of the Executive Committee, shall appoint from among the delegates such Standing Committees and Task Groups as may be necessary.
- C. The status and classification of participants at a General Council meeting shall be as follows:
  - 1. Each member church shall have a formula-specified number of voting delegates.
  - 2. An associate delegate is one who represents an associate-member organization. Associate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
  - 3. An affiliate delegate is one who represents an affiliated organization. Affiliate delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
  - 4. An ecumenical delegate is one who represents a recognised ecumenical fraternal organization. Ecumenical delegates have the right to speak but may not vote.
  - 5. Guests are those individuals who have been invited to attend the General Council meeting. Guests have the right to speak but may not vote.
  - 6. Observers are representatives from member churches or other communions who are considering becoming members of the World Communion of Reformed churches. Observers may participate in the activities of the General Council but do not have the right to vote.
  - 7. Consultants may be present at the General Council or Executive Committee meeting upon invitation by the officers. A consultant may be asked to address the assembly on the issue for which the consultant is present. A consultant's right to speak is limited to that specific matter, and the consultant may not vote.
  - 8. Visitors are those individuals who attend the public sessions of the General Council for personal reasons. Visitors do not have the right to speak, make motions, or vote.

### **II. EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

#### **A. Elections**

- 1. The General Council shall elect officers from among the delegates to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.
- 2. The General Council shall elect an Executive Committee from among the delegates to that General Council, taking into consideration geographical

distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, experience, and the advice of regional councils.

3. The Executive Committee members shall hold office from their installation until their successors are elected and installed in office.
4. Members of the Executive Committee shall be eligible to serve for not more than two consecutive terms.
5. The General Council, upon recommendation of the Executive Committee, shall elect a Nominating Committee of not more than ten persons, two of whom must be under 30 years of age, one of them female and one male. The nomination procedure shall take into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, and gender.
6. Members of the Nominating Committee are not eligible for election as officers or as members of the Executive Committee. The Nominating Committee shall receive and consider proposed nominations from delegates from Regional Councils and shall make its own proposals.
7. The Nominating Committee shall present to the General Council a slate of nominations for officers and for members of the Executive Committee. When the proposal of the Nominating Committee has been presented, nominations from the floor may be proposed as an alternative to any of the nominees recommended by the Nominating Committee.
8. The election of General Council Officers and Executive Committee members shall take place no sooner than twenty-four hours after the presentation of all candidates.
9. Each member of the executive committee shall be required to disclose potential and real conflict of interest issues. A signed form for such disclosure shall be retained in the office of the general secretary.
10. Delegates elected to the Executive Committee are ordinarily expected to represent the interests of the General Council.

#### B. Alternates

1. If any member of the Executive Committee is unable to attend a particular meeting of the Executive Committee, the President and the General Secretary, after due consultation, may appoint an alternate from the same region, to serve for that particular meeting as a member of the Executive Committee.
2. The Executive Committee may invite churches or organizations to appoint a representative to attend meetings of the Executive Committee. Such an invited representative shall be able to participate in the meeting without the right to vote.

#### C. Removal from office

1. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee is deemed by another officer or member to have failed to perform his or her duties, a hearing or hearings shall be conducted.

2. Having heard the accusations, having considered the appropriate evidence and having heard the response the accused person chooses to make, the Executive Committee may reprimand, suspend, or remove the accused person, or declare that the person's service will continue. The seriousness of the offence will determine the action to be taken—not necessarily the number of occasions of transgression.
3. When an officer or member of the Executive Committee has been found guilty of an offence by the ecclesiastical procedures of his or her church, the Executive Committee may declare the office or membership vacant after having taken note of the official statement of the charges (formal accusation), decision, and censure (judgment, sentence). The member shall be offered the opportunity to make a response in writing or in person (at her or his own expense) to the Executive Committee.
4. Whether or not there is a response, the Executive Committee may remove or suspend the person, or take no action.

#### D. Vacant positions

When the position of a member of the Executive Committee becomes vacant through death, resignation in writing to the General Secretary, removal from office by action of the Executive Committee, or non-attendance over an extended period, the Executive Committee may fill such vacancy in the following manner:

1. If the office of President becomes vacant, the Executive Committee shall fill the office of President by election from among the Vice-Presidents.
2. If the office of a Vice-President becomes vacant, the Executive Committee shall fill the office by election from among members of the Executive Committee.
3. If the office of General Treasurer becomes vacant, the Executive Committee shall select a person to fill the position.
4. If a general position on the Executive Committee becomes vacant, the Executive Committee may fill the vacancy by election from among those who were delegates to the previous General Council, taking into consideration geographical distribution, cultural and denominational diversity, gender, age, and experience.

#### E. Meetings

1. The Executive Committee shall meet once a year, the specific time and place to be set by the Executive Committee or by the President and General Secretary.
2. The President and the General Secretary may call special meetings of the Executive Committee, and shall do so at the request of a majority of the members of the Executive Committee.
3. A quorum shall be a majority of the total membership of the Executive Committee.

### III. FINANCES

- A. The Executive Committee may propose proportionate financial contributions to the churches.
- B. Any proposals for the disbursements of any funds relating to the World Communion of Reformed Churches, other than disbursements included in the annual budget, shall be approved by the Executive Committee.
- C. In exceptional cases, the General Secretary shall be permitted to initiate an action with financial consequences, within the parameters of the purposes and aims of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, after consultation with and the approval of the President and the General Treasurer.
- D. If necessary for timely consideration, the Executive Committee may vote on the adoption of the budget by mail ballot, teleconference, or other electronic means upon the recommendation of the officers.
- E. The General Treasurer and the finance secretary shall report regularly to the Executive Committee.
- F. The expenses of the President, the General Secretary, the General Treasurer, and other members of the staff will be met from the funds of the World Communion of Reformed Churches when they attend meetings of the General Council and the Executive Committee.
- G. The expenses of delegates to the General Council and of members of the Executive Committee attending the General Council shall be paid by the churches of which they are members unless a prior agreement for support has been negotiated.
- H. The World Communion of Reformed Churches shall pay for the expenses of the Executive Committee in accordance with established administrative guidelines.
- I. Each Regional Council shall submit to the General Secretary a copy of its annual audited financial statements.

Approved by the executive committees of REC and WARC and recommended for adoption by the Unifying General Council in June 2010.