

Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals Constitution

Article 1: Name

The name of this Association shall be Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals.

A. Fellowship: We believe that local churches are to work together and that it is appropriate for them to form associations for that purpose (Acts 15:1-35; 2 Corinthians 8; Galatians 1:2, 22; Colossians 4:13-18). Associational fellowship should become not a burden which restricts ministry, but a help and encouragement which facilitates greater ministry among churches who share mutual respect, love and acceptance.

B. Independent: We believe that the local church is appointed by God to carry out the work of the Kingdom in this age (1 Timothy 3:15; Matthew 16:18, 19). We do not believe that church councils or groups of churches have authority over local churches.

C. Reformed: We affirm the five "Solas" of the Reformation: *Sola Scriptura*, *Sola Gratia*, *Sola Fide*, *Solus Christus*, and *Soli Deo Gloria*. We stand in the tradition of the historic reformed confessions of faith such as *The London Baptist Confession of 1644* and *The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689*.

D. Evangelicals: We believe that men are by nature lost and hell-bound. They must be born again and receive forgiveness of their sins through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Article 2: Purposes of this Association

A. That churches may mutually encourage one another through edifying fellowship and counsel.

B. That churches of like mind may share resources and assist one another in cooperative efforts in ministry to God's glory.

C. That believers may enjoy an identity and unity beyond that of their local church by praying for and participating in the ministry efforts of other churches and by identifying a network of other similar churches when they travel or move (John 17:20-26).

Article 3: The Standards of the Association

A. Authority: The Scriptures (the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments) are the only ultimate and final authority in all matters of faith and practice. All other confessions and doctrinal statements are subordinate, fallible and amendable.

B. Doctrinal Standard: members of this Association shall be in agreement with the doctrinal statement attached to this document.

1. The doctrinal statement of the Association may be revised by a three-fourths vote of the delegates at an Annual Association Meeting.

2. Amendments must be submitted in writing, along with reasons for the suggested revision(s), to the Executive Board, who will send them to member churches at least sixty days in advance of the meeting.

3. A discussion of the proposed amendment(s) and vote will take place at the Annual Association Meeting.

C. Constitution: This Constitution shall be the governing standard of our Association. It may be amended by a three-fourths vote of the delegates at the Annual Meeting following a procedure similar to that in 3.B.1 above.

D. Position Statement: The Association may periodically adopt a position regarding matters of faith and practice.

1. Position Statements shall be voted on by the membership at an Annual Meeting after being proposed and disseminated to members in writing at least sixty days in advance. A three-fourths vote of the delegates is required for adoption.

2. Members may suggest position statements to the Executive Board; however, position statements shall be placed before the membership for vote only by approval of the Executive Board.

3. Adopted position statements will become part of and published with the official documents of the Association.

Article 4: Membership in the Association

A. Church membership:

1. Churches applying for membership in the Association must:

a. Be in agreement with the doctrinal statement of the Association. Any exceptions must be noted when applying (see 4.A.3 below).

- b. State their concurrence or non-concurrence with the Position Statements of the Association.
 - c. Be recommended in writing by at least one member church.
 - d. Agree to abide by the Constitution of the Association.
 - e. Send representatives to at least one national or regional FIRE Conference prior to or in conjunction with making application.
 - f. Submit a written application to the Executive Board.
2. Churches shall be received into membership by approval of the members. The Executive Board shall determine the specific membership application, approval and reception process. The Executive Board shall ensure that this process is published.
3. Churches which note an exception to the Association's doctrinal statement or which have distinctive practices that would likely be considered uncommon may be admitted by the following procedure:
- a. Any exceptions or distinctive practices should be noted and explained at the time the church makes application. Applications noting exceptions or distinctive practices will be referred to the Executive Board.
 - b. The Executive Board will consider the exceptions or distinctive practices and may ask the officers of the church to review relevant books or other materials before the Annual Meeting.
 - c. The representatives of the church will be given opportunity to explain their views and to answer questions at the Annual Meeting.
 - d. The church may be received into membership upon a three-fourths vote of the delegates of member churches at the Annual Meeting. An asterisk next to its name in the Association's directory will identify a church received with exceptions or distinctive practices. Churches received into membership with exceptions or distinctive practices shall not proselytize or become contentious about their differences.
4. In exceptional cases, the Executive Board may recommend that a church be received into membership without having previously attended a conference, or without sending a representative to the conference at which they are being recommended for membership.

B. Withdrawal from membership: Churches may withdraw from membership in the Association at any time for reasons sufficient to themselves. They shall provide written notice to the Executive Board, who will inform the other churches.

C. Removal from membership:

1. A church which no longer meets the requirements for membership in the Association (4.A.1) may be removed by a two-thirds vote of the delegates at a meeting of the Association upon recommendation of the Executive Board.
2. A proposal for the removal of a church from membership in the Association must include reasons for exclusion and should be presented to the member churches at least sixty days prior to the Annual Meeting.
3. The Executive Board shall diligently attempt to resolve the issues prior to a vote for removal.
4. A church subject to removal may circulate a rebuttal among member churches.
5. Churches that are not represented at the Annual Association Meeting or at a Regional Conference for three consecutive years may be removed from membership according to the procedures of (4.C.1-4).

D. Individual membership:

1. Individuals from non-member churches may join as associate members. Requirements (4.A.1) and procedures (4.A.2) shall be similar to those for churches.
2. Individual members are welcome to participate at the Association meetings but may not vote on Association business or serve on the Executive Board.
3. Individual members may withdraw from the Association or be removed in a manner similar to the removal of member churches.

Article 5: National Structure of the Association

A. Meetings:

1. The Association shall meet at least annually.

2. Each member church may send two men (usually elders or deacons) as voting representatives at the Association meetings. Churches sending only one delegate will only have one vote.
3. In addition, member churches may send as many non-voting attendees to Association meetings as they wish.
4. Business to be conducted may include matters such as:
 - a. Receiving new member churches.
 - b. Removing member churches.
 - c. Selecting the Executive Board.
 - d. Amending the standards of the Association.
 - e. Addressing doctrinal issues.
5. The Annual Meeting shall also include times of instruction and prayer.
6. Open and closed meetings.
 - a. Ordinarily, Association meetings will be open to all who wish to attend.
 - b. The Association may retire to closed session (restricted to voting representatives only) upon a majority vote of the delegates.
7. Other Association meetings may be called for a particular purpose by the Executive Board. Procedures described in (5.A.2, 3, 6) shall be followed. All member churches must be informed at least sixty days in advance.

B. The Executive Board

1. The delegates at the Annual Meeting shall elect an Executive Board.
 - a. Board members shall serve for three years and may succeed themselves for no more than two consecutive terms. However, the Board may arrange terms of service so that no more than approximately one-third of the Board terms expire in any given year.

- b. The number of Board members shall be proportional to the number of member churches but not greater than approximately 10% of the number of member churches.
 - c. The Executive Board shall place nominations before the membership for vote. Nominees shall be published to the membership at least thirty days prior to the annual meeting. All members may suggest potential nominees to the Executive Board.
 - d. A majority vote shall be required to elect board members. Voting shall be accomplished by secret ballot.
2. The Executive Board shall manage the various affairs of the Association, including but not limited to receiving and removing members, facilitating Regional Associations, maintaining membership and other Association records and documents, shaping the vision and direction of the Association, overseeing the stated meetings and functions of the Association, and authorizing representatives (Article 7).
 3. The Executive Board shall organize itself in such a manner as it deems most effective for the accomplishment of its responsibilities. The Board may receive and expend funds necessary for Board functions such as communication and promotion. It shall select from among its members an Executive Committee that shall consist of a Moderator, a Moderator pro tem, and a Secretary. The Executive Committee shall determine the specific roles and responsibilities of the Executive Board.
 4. The Executive Board shall maintain an operations manual containing policies and procedures that govern the functional operation of both the Association and the Board.
 5. The Executive Board shall possess authority to make temporary exceptions to operations policy and constitutional guidance as are necessary and reasonable for efficient oversight of the Association.

Article 6: Regional Associations

Local associations may form under the umbrella of the national Association and shall function in ways similar to the national Association.

Article 7: Limitations of the Association

- A. The Association may not interfere with the affairs of its member churches. The only authority the Association may exercise is to remove a church from membership in the Association (see 4.C).

- B. Member churches may not be restricted from joining other associations or from having fellowship with or participating in projects with churches outside the Association.
- C. The Association may not have any employees or funds except as provided for in Article 5.B.2 and 5.B.3. .
- D. The Association itself may not sponsor any projects or ministries (such as missionaries). Each project or ministry must be under the oversight and authority of a particular local church.
- E. The limitation of power of the Association shall not be construed to prohibit the Association from various functions such as:
 - 1. The Association may provide services and support to its members and may authorize member(s) of a FIRE-member church to represent the Association as approved by the Executive Board, such as but not limited to appointing an endorsing agent for chaplaincy, for missions coordination, and for church relations.
 - 2. The Association may facilitate prayer for one another by circulating prayer and information letters to member churches.
 - 3. The Association may facilitate the cooperation of local churches in ministry projects, such as but not limited to sending career missionaries, short-term missions projects, church planting, forming or teaching in pastoral training institutes, publishing and distributing media, utilizing technology, engaging in compassion ministries, and participating in advisory councils for ordinations of church officers.
 - 4. The Association may facilitate the participation of local churches in joint meetings such as camps, conferences, pastors/elders conferences, and seminars.
 - 5. The Association may facilitate the efforts of local churches in offering mutual assistance and sharing of resources, such as but not limited to exchanging pulpits, lending personnel to meet particular needs (e.g., internships, special classes), sharing material resources (e.g., extra equipment and supplies), and developing curricula.
 - 6. The Association may assist member churches when difficulties or differences threaten the peace, unity and edification of one church or of the churches in general (Acts 15:1-35; Proverbs 15:22; see also *1689 London Baptist Confession* 26.15). A member church must

request such assistance, and the conclusions of a mediator or church council may not be imposed upon the churches or their officers.

- a. Member churches may request help from the Association in resolving such disputes as may occur:
 - i. Between member churches (e.g., a complaint about unscriptural teaching or practice).
 - ii. Among the officers of member churches.
 - iii. Between church members and their leaders (after every effort has first been made to resolve the issue within the local church).
- b. The process shall be as follows:
 - i. One party in the dispute shall request assistance from the Executive Board in writing. Members of the Executive Board who are parties to the dispute shall remove themselves from the process.
 - ii. The Executive Board shall make arrangements for a meeting of the affected parties and agreed upon representatives from other member churches. The representatives shall organize themselves as a council in an appropriate manner to hear testimony and shall seek to effect reconciliation consistent with truth among all parties.
 - iii. The Association is able to give counsel on the matters in dispute through its chosen representatives and to publish its findings to all the churches concerned (Acts 15:23ff.), but the representatives have no jurisdiction over the churches themselves or their officers.

As amended May 18, 2011