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Who we are and what we believe

First Reformed Church is a community of believers transformed by the magnificent grace of the resurrected One, Jesus Christ. We are rightly oriented through worship, guided by the authority of Scripture, and equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. First Reformed Church professes the faith expressed in the Apostles Creed and affirms the theology of the Heidelberg Catechism. FRC is a member of the “Kingdom Network”, a community of Reformed churches who profess support for the following stated beliefs: The Belgic Confession, The Belhar Confession, The Canons of Dort, The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and the Great Lakes Catechism on Sexuality and Marriage.

Unity, Uniformity, and Scriptural Interpretation

We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be our ultimate authority. Without error, they are altogether sufficient for Christian faith and practice. We also recognize the need to be ever-reforming and always seeking a better understanding of God’s universal truth. We affirm that faithful Biblical interpretation can, at times, produce different understandings of God’s Word in non-salvation issues. We also affirm that faithful, prayerful discussion amongst believers who disagree is healthy for the body. We affirm that followers of Jesus can dwell in unity of faith without uniformity of thought and still minister alongside one another toward the task of ushering in the coming Kingdom of God.

The Office of Elder

The Necessity of Elders

It is not only fitting, but Biblically mandated, that the local church be governed by a plurality of elders. Elders were found in the earliest New Testament churches (Acts 11:30; 15:22; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; James 5:14; 1 Pet. 5:1), and the Apostle Paul appointed elders or instructed the appointment of elders in the local church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

The Honor of Eldership

Serving as an elder is a noble task (1 Tim. 3:1). Elders are worthy of honor and respect (Heb. 13:7, 17) and ought to be esteemed highly in love because of their work in the Lord (1 Thess. 5:12). The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). Moreover, it is appropriate that those in the church who sow spiritual seed reap a material harvest for their labors (1 Cor. 9:11; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:18).

The Desire for Eldership

While it is true that the aspiration to eldership should not be from selfish ambition (Gal. 5:20), desire plays a legitimate part in being appointed an elder. Where there is a desire truly generated by the Spirit to lead and love the people of God as an elder, this desire is not only

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acceptable but commendable (1 Tim. 3:1). In fact, those who shepherd God's flock must do so not under compulsion, but because they are willing and eager to serve (1 Pet. 5:2).

The Qualifications for Elders

The requirements for elders, for the most part, are no different than God's requirements for any Christian, except that God calls an elder to be a distinguished example of the Christ-likeness to which he (God) calls all Christians.

Elders must be of excellent virtue in relation to God. They must hold firmly to Scriptural truths (1 Tim. 3:9; Titus 1:9), be upright and holy (Titus 1:8), able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9), above reproach (1 Tim. 3:2, 9; Titus 1:6), not a recent convert (1 Tim. 3:6), and a lover of what is good (Titus 1:8).

Elders must be of excellent virtue in relation to themselves. They should not be quick-tempered (Titus 1:7), nor given to drunkenness (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7), nor in love with money (1 Tim. 3:3). They must be disciplined (Titus 1:8), sober-minded (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7), and self-controlled (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).

Elders must be of excellent virtue in relation to family. They must be faithful to their spouse, not a philanderer, nor a polygamist (1 Tim. 3:2; 12). They must manage their family well (1 Tim. 3:4, 12; Titus 1:6) and have obedient children (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 12; Titus 1:6).

The Duties for Elders

Elders are to direct the affairs of the church (1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17; Titus 1:7). This will include decision making (Acts 15), prayer (Acts 6:4), and general oversight (Acts 20:28). They supervise the membership of the church.

Elders are to shepherd the flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2; Jude 12). They must guard the church from error (Acts 20:28-31) and attend to the needs of the sheep (James 5:14). They are to guard the sacraments from being profaned and exercise loving discipline when necessary (Matt. 18:1 Cor. 5).

Elders are to instruct the people of God (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9; Acts 6:2; Eph. 4:12-13). They build up the church in right doctrine and sound teaching and make certain what is preached is in accord with the Scriptures.

The Office of Deacon

The Meaning of the Term Deacon

The word "deacon" comes from the Greek word *diakonos*. This term usually has the meaning servant, and in particular, table server. The term is used twenty-nine times in the New Testaments in a variety of ways, but always in connection with serving, service, or servanthood.

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Qualifications for Deacon

Deacons are to display the character of Christ, just as any believer in Jesus should do. Scripture goes on to provide specific qualities that deacons should clearly manifest in their lives. The paramount concern when choosing a deacon is to choose someone who is “known to be full of the Spirit and Wisdom” (Acts 6:3). The rest of the qualities a deacon is to possess are enumerated in the following passage from 1 Tim. 3:8-12.

“⁸Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁹They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. ¹¹In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. ¹²A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.”

In the local church, deacons are to be members of spiritual commitment, exemplary life, compassionate spirit, and sound judgment who are honorable, genuine, authentic, temperate, and blameless in all areas of life. In addition, they must be content with a simple lifestyle, have deep convictions concerning the faith, and display excellent virtue in relation to their family (faithful to their spouse and able to manage their children).

Responsibilities of Deacons

The office of the deacon exists to serve the body. By so doing, deacons relieve elders of certain duties and pressures that would divert elders from the ministry of the word and prayer, and the visionary oversight of the church. In general, deacons should be ready to assist the elders of the church in any “service” that would support and promote the ministry of the Word.

Specifically, deacons are called to the ministry of mercy, service, and outreach. This includes but is not limited to, ministries that care for the building and grounds; provide practical assistance in job-hunting, housing matters, legal aid, and child care; serve and minister to the sick, poor, hurt, distressed, and helpless; visit and comfort those in material need; provide aid to the victims of abuse and disaster; express social concerns of the church; oversee and carry out work that is concerned with the redemption of creation; and direct the attention of the church towards service and ministry both in the church and in the world.

Deacons are to receive and distribute the contributions of the congregation, giving personal attention and care to the whole benevolence program of the church. They are to have charge of all gifts and should exercise careful stewardship of all funds, goods, and properties of the congregation. In all of their duties, deacons are to exercise their gifts to prepare all of God’s people for the work of Christian service in order to build up the body of Christ.

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Abortion

We believe that the Bible teaches that an individual human life begins at conception. (Ps. 139:13-16; Jer. 1:5; Luke 1:39-44)

We believe that the abortion-on-demand decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, on January 22, 1973 (i.e., "Roe V. Wade") constitutes a clear turning away from Biblical standards.

Therefore, we encourage the members of First Reformed Church in Orange City to uphold, promote, and facilitate Biblical truths regarding the unborn child (Matt. 25:31-46; Rom. 13:3-5; Ezek. 33:7-9; Prov. 24:11-12) and to engage in compassionate ministry with those struggling through difficult pregnancies.

Same-Sex Relationships

Homosexual acts are viewed throughout Scripture as sinful (Lev. 18:22; I Cor. 6:9-10; I Tim. 1:8-11) and as a perversion (Rom. 1:18-32) of God's intention that sexual relationships be reserved for heterosexual marriage (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6; Eph. 5:31-32). This applies even to so-called "monogamous" homosexual relationships (Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27).

The response of the Church toward those in same-sex relationships should be twofold. We uphold the truth and light of God's Word even in the face of cultural shifts in this area. (Ps. 119:150; 2 Pet. 1:19). And we will reach out with heartfelt compassion to the same-sex attracted in the midst of their struggle. We will bring the good news of God's love for us sinners, of Christ's gracious work to affect our forgiveness through repentance and faith in Him, and of the Holy Spirit's power to change our lives. We will not magnify this sin out of proportion to other sins but must minister humbly, always mindful of the mercy we have received (Rom. 12:3, 15:7; I Cor. 4:7).

Women's Leadership

First Reformed Church will continue to recognize the role of women in leadership as exhibited through the eligibility of women for election to the Consistory. This recognition is not intended to promote either gender but rather to acknowledge and engage the talents and gifts of both men and women in the advancement of God's Kingdom.

Sacraments

FRC practices two sacraments: Baptism and Communion. Both are significant in the life of the church and its members and are to be approached with reverence and humility. The sacraments are under the supervision of the elders and administered by ordained pastors and elders.

Baptism

The Reformed view of baptism is drawn from scripture and is summarized in the Westminster Confession, Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort. This view can be understood under three headings: the meaning of baptism, the recipients of baptism, and the mode of baptism.

The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is the rite of initiation into the visible church, which consists of all those who possess faith in Christ, along with their children (Acts 2:39). In administering baptism, the church exercises obedience to Christ's command to "make disciples . . . baptizing them" (Matt. 28:19).

Baptism is a visible sign whereby Christ and His benefits are shown forth to believers and applied to them. The Reformed view asserts that something happens in baptism—grace is conferred to recipients. This view asserts that baptism does not regenerate; nor does it work through the automatic efficacy of the sacrament itself or in the precise moment of its administration. Instead, baptism works through the operation of the Spirit in His people, meaning that it can either precede faith or follow it. (John 3:8)

The sacrament is a sign and seal of cleansing from sin and grafting into Christ. It is not simply an outward sign of an inward change; it is an act of God, a solemn promise to apply to recipients the benefits signified in the sacrament—namely, the promises of God's covenant.

The Recipients of Baptism

Anyone who comes to faith as an adult and who has never received a valid baptism should be baptized. The Reformed view is that the children of at least one believer should be baptized as well.

Under the old covenant, children were considered members of the covenant community and were granted the sign of initiation into that covenant, which was circumcision. Under the new covenant, the substance of the one overarching covenant of grace has not changed; only the administration has (Col. 2:11-12). Therefore, the children of believers are to receive the sign of initiation, which is now baptism (Acts 2:38-39).

The Mode of Baptism

Ordinary water is to be used in the sacrament. Full immersion or sprinkling are acceptable modes of the sacrament. Various passages speak of the Holy Spirit as "coming upon," "falling upon," or being "poured out" on believers (Acts 1:8; 2:3, 17; 11:15-16). When the Holy Spirit falls on someone in this way, it means He is regenerating him and working faith in him. This is baptism of the Holy Spirit—salvation (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:13-14). Therefore, it makes sense for the baptism of water to imitate the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

To summarize, the Reformed view understands baptism to be a sacrament that was instituted by Christ and is properly administered to those who are in the visible church, along with their children. Anyone desiring baptism for themselves or a child should notify the pastors or elders of FRC. A meeting with the person or family precedes the administration of the sacrament.

Holy Communion/Lord's Supper

Communion, also known as the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, is Christ's gift of grace to the church. Communion is a means by which Christ continually nourishes, strengthens, and comforts us. The Lord's Supper is a visible sign of something internal and invisible, the means by which God works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we follow what Jesus did when he fed the 5000. All four Gospels recount how Jesus fed a crowd of 5,000 (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:34-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13). There were 12 baskets of leftovers, which symbolize how the bread that Jesus gives is more than enough to feed the 12 tribes of Israel, as well as a superabundant and

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inexhaustible source of grace for all. Jesus employed four eucharistic actions when he fed the crowd: He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it, all specific actions that he would repeat at the Last Supper. Later, Jesus broke bread and drank wine with his disciples on the night before he died, as recorded in Luke 22:15-20.

¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”

¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

The apostle Paul reminds the church how the sacrament should be approached in 1 Cor. 11:28-29.

²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

We receive gifts of bread and wine or grape juice, give thanks to God, and share the food and drink with each other. In these simple actions, believers experience a profound mystery: Christ himself is present, and his life passes into us and is made ours. Reformed Christians do not believe that the bread and wine or grape juice are physically transformed into Christ's body and blood.

At FRC, there is diversity in the practice of communion. We may administer the elements through intinction (dipping the bread in the juice) or serving the elements separately. Sometimes people are served while seated. At other times, they may be invited to come forward to the table.

How often should communion be celebrated?

At FRC, communion is celebrated at least once every three months.

Who may participate in communion?

Christ is the host and invites us to his table. At FRC, we practice “open Communion”. Our liturgy will invite all who have an understanding of the saving grace of Jesus Christ and are active members of their church to participate in the sacrament.

It is not expected for someone to possess a complete understanding of the covenant and of grace prior to partaking in the Lord's Supper. It is beyond understanding. The sacrament is a mystery in which the bread and wine are visible signs of God's invisible grace.

Regarding the participation of children, FRC urges parents to discern whether their children should partake. If they choose to do so, it is recommended that they inform the pastors and/or

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elders prior to their participation. It is expected that the parents have discussed the meaning and significance of the sacrament with their children and are convinced they understand at an age-appropriate level.

What can all who partake understand about communion?

Christ is the host at communion. He invites us, welcomes us, and feeds us. At the Lord's Supper, we are all guests. We show respect.

Communion is a family meal and shows that we belong to the church family. During communion, we share in a special meal as part of the family.

Communion is the church's thanksgiving to God. It is a special time to thank God for Jesus and his sacrifice to forgive our sins.

Communion is a way to remember. When we celebrate communion, we do the same thing Jesus and the disciples did at the Last Supper, and we remember God's promises. We remember who we are—and whose we are.

During communion, we think of the future realm with Christ. We don't just look back at Jesus's death, but we also look ahead to the future. An important feature of the covenant is promise and expectation.