

Alto Reformed Church

Leadership Covenant & Ordination



Contents

Introduction

Our Leadership Covenant

Our Statement of Faith

Our Ordination of Pastors, Elders, and Deacons

Covenant of the Ordained in the Alliance of Reformed Churches

Organization Convictions of the Alliance of Reformed Churches

Your Next Steps

INTRODUCTION

We rejoice in your commitment to following Jesus, and we are blessed that you have chosen to join us in his mission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20)! **We are excited about our vision to develop and deploy Christ-like leaders and believe God has a part for you to play in this work.**

We long to see you want to go beyond foundational faith to spiritual maturity. In the Covenant Partnership/membership materials, you were asked where you are at on the discipleship journey (below). Covenant Partners need to at least be “devoted,” that is to have confessed Jesus as their Lord and Savior, believing foundational truths of the Christian faith, and committing to live out essential behaviors of believers.

Where are you on the discipleship journey?



If you have not read through the Covenant Partnership materials lately, you are urged to do so as it covers some essentials about our mission, history, and reformed beliefs and practices.

Leadership requires even more. Godly leadership requires more faith, more wisdom, more compassion, more character, and more commitment. But we believe God can empower, encourage, and equip you for this.

A Little Background & Explanation:

Several years ago, our consistory decided it was necessary to create an “Approved Teacher” list in order to assure parents and participants that those teaching at Alto affirm our beliefs and live in a Christ-honoring manner. Initially this was done simply by a motion of the elders giving their approval. We later broadened this to include other leadership positions and called it the “Approved Leader” list. It required consistory members, teachers, youth coaches, children’s message leaders, small group leaders, choir directors, and worship team leaders to affirm our Statement of Faith, sign our Leadership Covenant, and be approved by the elders.

With the updating of our bylaws in 2022, we have maintained this structure and process. We have also decided that it would be good to have everyone renew their commitment every five years. We plan to start the Leadership Covenant renewal in 2025. We also improved some of the wording and clarity of the Leadership Covenant. In holding to Paul’s instruction to Timothy to “*guard what has been entrusted to your care*” ([1 Timothy 6:20](#)), we have focused the covenant on guarding the mission, purity, and unity of the church. **If you are on board with it, sign it and turn it into the church office.** If you have questions, please ask.

In this packet, you will also find information on ordination as a Pastor, Elder or Deacon in the Alliance of Reformed Churches. This is something we hope you aspire to as well. (1 Timothy 3:1) These positions require the affirmation of the church, and if you are nominated you will need to sign the Covenant of the Ordained.

You don’t have to be Jesus, but you do need to be maturing and becoming more like Jesus. So, if you are ready to move beyond the foundations of the faith, then Covenant Leadership is something you should pursue. We want to walk with you through this material and help you be the leader God has called you to be. Understanding this material and committing to guard the mission, purity, and unity of the church is a great step forward. **Welcome to the journey.**

OUR LEADERSHIP COVENANT

Leadership Covenant of Alto Reformed Church

Guiding Scripture

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. (1 Timothy 6:20)

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (2 Timothy 1:14)

Our Covenant

We will guard the mission, purity, and unity of the church. (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14; See Mark 13:5-11,23,33; Matthew 16:6-12; Luke 12:1; Acts 20:31)

Guarding the Mission of the Church - As leaders at Alto Reformed Church, we believe that we are called with others to lead the congregation in fulfilling Christ's mission to know Jesus and make Jesus known. (Philippians 3:10; Romans 15:20) We want to become the best we can be at fulfilling our church's mission within our community. (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) We will seek to do this with faith, hope, and obedience to God. If He takes us down new roads, we will trust Him. (Genesis 12:1-9; Hebrews 11:8-19) If He calls us to enable others to do what we are not able to do, we will do that. (Acts 6; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:11-12) God's work must progress. We will diligently pray and seek His wisdom to know how far and how fast to go, and what this means for us as individuals and as an entire congregation. (2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 7:7-11) At the same time, we recognize that change and progress require us to think new thoughts and consider new methods, just as the Bible says that new wine needs new wineskins. (Matthew 9:17) We recognize that change and improvement issues are subjective, involving varying methods and stylistic tastes. We will strive to be open to new ideas and sincerely weigh the pros and cons, not limiting God by our lack of imagination. We will guard the mission of the church.

Guarding the Purity of the Church - We affirm our Statement of Faith (see www.altoreformedchurch.org/our-beliefs) and commit ourselves to teaching these truths, living within their bounds, and graciously dialoguing with those who disagree. (1 Timothy 3:1-13; 4:16) If one has a dispute with any of our non-salvation beliefs, they must teach that which we affirm, avoid creating division, and dialogue only with the Elder board about their concerns. We understand God forgives repentant sinners (1 John 1:9) and we need not to walk in condemnation and guilt. (Romans 8:1) At the same time, we cannot continue to walk in sin. (Romans 6:1-2) Nor can we remain silent when others fall into sin or heresy. (Jude 1:23) As leaders, we will set an example as transformed Christ-followers (Romans 12:1-2) who are skilled in handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15) and reflect the character of Christ in our attitude (Philippians 2:1-18) and actions. (Galatians 5:16-25) We will guard the truth and purity of the church.

Guarding the Unity of the Church - As servant-hearted leaders, we will seek to model grace and truth in our relationships with one another just as Jesus did. (John 8:1-11) Therefore, we commit ourselves to authentic, loving relationships within this congregation. (John 13:34-35) We agree that the kingdom of God is bigger than any individual or group of people. (John 17:15-23) We earnestly seek to do God's will for our congregation. We will work at setting aside personal agendas. If we see that differences of opinions arise, we agree to seek resolution in a God-honoring, biblical manner. This means going directly to the person(s) with whom we have a concern or disagreement instead of talking about the person behind his/her back. (Matthew 5:22-24; 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 6:1-8) We will esteem, love, and be respectful of others, even if we hold differing ideas or priorities. If we are not able to resolve our differences through face-to-face communication or even with the help of a third person, we agree to part ways without casting blame, pulling others away, or being generally divisive to our local congregation. (Acts 15:2) We will speak well of one another to others, promoting purity, unity and peace within our church family. (1 Thessalonians 5:11) We will be accountable to one another for our conduct, spiritual growth, ministries, and faithful service to God. (James 5:16) We will guard the unity of the church.

We commit ourselves to this covenant,

Elders of Alto Reformed Church

Print Name

Sign Name

Date

(Based on the Pastoral Leadership Team Covenant of Meredith Drive Reformed Church & *How to Change your Church (Without killing it)*, by Alan Nelson & Gene Appel, p. 253)

OUR STATEMENT OF FAITH

Statements Matter...

Sometimes we make statements with little thought. Particularly when we are hurt or angry, we say things we don't really mean. Quite often there is just enough truth in the statement to be far more destructive than we realize. Other statements help us work together by clarifying what is important and what we do.

While our creeds (short statements of basic beliefs) and confessions (longer statements) teach the fundamentals of our faith, they do not provide the clarity we need today regarding some controversial issues. Our elders initially adopted this statement in 2018 with thanks to Corinth Reformed Church, in Byron Center, MI for providing much of the content. They have made small edits since then to bring clarity and address new issues. We realize these sometimes address deeply personal convictions. We believe careful study of the statements and Scriptures will lead you to affirm the statements with us.

It is not our intent to condemn others who believe differently, but to welcome sinners to the cross where there is forgiveness and transformation for all. If you struggle with some of these beliefs or habitual sin, we want to walk with you, help you, and equip you as a Christ-like leader. You are encouraged to speak with an elder or a staff member.

Statements matter, and we hope you will take some time to reflect on our Statement of Faith. May God continue to teach and guide us into all wisdom and truth as we make His love visible to the world.

INTRODUCTION

Alto Reformed Church is Christian, Reformed, and Confessional. We affirm the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed as universal expressions of the Christian faith. We affirm the Belgic Confession and its appendix, the Belhar Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and its appendix, the Great Lakes Catechism on Human Sexuality, and the Canons of Dort as Reformed expressions of the Christian faith whose teachings agree with the Word of God. These creeds and confessions inform and illuminate the way we understand the Bible, shape the way we live in response to the gospel, and provide guidance for faithfulness in the future. The following statements further clarify our core beliefs and how we will live.

ABOUT GOD

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He is infinite, eternal, almighty, incomprehensible, invisible, unchangeable, and perfect in holiness, truth, and love. He is completely wise, just, and good, as well as the overflowing source of all good. He has eternally existed in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (i.e., the "Trinity"). These three are equal in divine perfections and are one God. (Genesis 1:1, 26-27; John 1:1-3; Daniel 4:34-35; Deuteronomy 10:14; 1 Kings 8:27; Psalm 90:2; 1 Timothy 1:17; Revelation 22:13; Revelation 4:8; Deuteronomy 32:4; 1 John 4:8; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14; BC 1, 8-14; HC 6,9, 20,25,94,95; the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed)

ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and is fully human and fully divine. He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless human life and taught the way of God's kingdom while performing miracles. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice for sin by dying on the cross. He arose from the dead after three days, demonstrating God's power over sin and death. For a period of 40 days after his resurrection, he was seen by over 500 people before ascending to heaven. He is now seated at the right hand of the Father and offers continual intercession for His people. He is Lord of all and is the head of His body, the Church. (John 1:14; Romans 1:3-4; 1 Timothy 2:5; Titus 2:13; Matthew 1:18-25; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:1-8; Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 7:25; Colossians 1:18; BC 10,19,25,26)

ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son and is present in the world to make us aware of our need for Jesus Christ, convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He regenerates our hearts so that we can respond with faith. He illuminates the scripture. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides Christians with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. Christians seek to live under His control daily. (2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; Ephesians 1:13; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; Galatians 5:22-26; 1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19; BC 11)

ABOUT PEOPLE AND SIN

God made man male and female in His own image, as the crown of creation, that we might have fellowship with Him. Tempted by Satan, man rebelled against God, incurring physical, spiritual, and eternal death, which is separation from God. As a consequence, our whole being is marred by depravity, and we now live in a sin-filled world. Human beings are hostile toward God and are lost

and without hope, apart from salvation in Christ. (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 8:3-6; Colossians 3:10; Genesis 3:6-8; Romans 5:12-21; Isaiah 53:6a; Romans 3:19-20; Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:1-2; Ephesians 2:1-3; BC 15,16).

ABOUT SALVATION

Jesus Christ is the gospel. The good news is revealed in His birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Salvation is a gift of grace from God to humankind, given through faith for the glory of God. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement, good works, or religious ceremony. On the cross, Jesus was our sacrificial substitute, redeeming us from the dominion of the devil, removing our guilt, and appeasing the wrath of God's just and holy verdict against our sin. It is only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's sacrifice for sin that we can be saved from the wrath of God. Those who turn away from sin in repentance and look to Jesus Christ receive the gift of eternal life and are declared righteous by God. (Ephesians 2:8; Galatians 2:16; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Peter 3:18; Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30; Romans 5:9; Romans 8:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; BC 17-23)

ABOUT ASSURANCE

Because salvation is a gift of God, the believer is secure in this salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. (John 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5; BC 13,16)

ABOUT THE BIBLE

We believe that the Bible (the 66 books of the Old and New Testament) is God's Word, fully inspired and without error in its original form. It was written by human authors who were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so that what they wrote is the Word of God. It is the supreme authority in all matters of faith and life.¹ (Mark 13:31; Proverbs 20:5; Psalm 119:105, 160; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21; John 20:31; Acts 20:32; Matthew 4:4; BC 2-7)

ABOUT ETERNITY

All of us were created to exist forever. We will either exist in union with God through the work of Jesus Christ, or eternally separated from God by sin. The place of eternal separation from God is called Hell, and it is a place of eternal punishment for sin. Heaven is the place of eternal union and eternal life with God. Only those belonging to Jesus Christ will have eternal life in the new heaven and new earth and will live in ever-increasing joy, to the glory of God. (John 3:16; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:7b-10; Matthew 25:41; Revelation 21:27)

ABOUT THE CHURCH

The Church is the living spiritual body of Christ on earth. Jesus is the head and the source of its life. The church is the creation of God through His Word and the Spirit, calling human beings out of sin into the fellowship of Christ's body. All true believers in Christ are members of the universal Church and should be in a vital and committed relationship with a local church so they can grow in their faith, worship and fellowship with other believers, and make a united impact upon the world. Christ has given spiritual gifts to the church for the equipping of His body that it might mature and grow. God's people receive pastoral care and leadership and the opportunity to employ their God-given gifts in His service in relation to one another and the world. (Ephesians 1:22-23; Ephesians 5:23; 1 Corinthians 12:12,27; Hebrews 10:23-25; Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:11-16; BC 27-32)

ABOUT CHRISTIAN CONDUCT

The Christian is called and empowered, as a response to salvation, to live out the Great Commandment – to love God with all our being and to love our neighbors as ourselves; and the Great Commission – to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all Jesus commanded us. A follower of Jesus Christ is set apart to fulfill this calling for the glory of God; seeking to be blameless in conduct, seeking to be a faithful steward and seeking to live a life filled with the Spirit of God, revealing the fruit of the Spirit. In summary, we are to seek to become more Christ-like. (Luke 10:27; Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:6-9; Colossians 1:9-10; BC 24,28,29)

¹ There are some doctrines on which two Christians may agree to disagree, even though they are in the same local church and part of the same leadership team. Examples include: the order of events associated with the Lord's return, the role of women in leadership (See "[Men, Women and Biblical Equality](#)" for the egalitarian view and the "[Danvers Statement](#)" for the complementarian view), and the degree of separation from worldly practices. When teaching in any such area, it will be made clear these beliefs are not essential for salvation or leadership in the church. We may state the case for our position, but we will also acknowledge that sincere and intelligent Christians hold different views. We are committed to nurturing the unity we share as the family of God, and to obeying His command to love one another. (Romans 14:1-15:7; 2 Timothy 2:23-24; Titus 3:9)

ABOUT THE COVENANT

We are a covenant keeping church. God enters into a covenant of grace (an unchangeable, divinely imposed agreement) with those whom He calls to be His sons and daughters. Christ serves as a mediator of this new covenant in which He fulfills the conditions for us and reconciles us to God. Covenant people enter into this covenantal relationship through faith in Jesus Christ and express that covenant by obedience to God's commands, living our lives as His children and keeping covenant in our own relationships with our spouses, family, and all believers in all places. (Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3, 17:7, 22:16-18; Galatians 3:8-9, 14-16; Romans 4:11-12, 15:8-9; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ephesians 3:7-12; Romans 8:12-14; Ephesians 4:1, 5:21; Deuteronomy 7:9)

ABOUT THE SACRAMENTS

We believe there are two sacraments given by Christ to strengthen our faith as members of His Church.

The first sacrament is baptism; which is a sign and seal of God's eternal covenant of grace for us and our children. We do not believe that the act of baptism saves a person. Baptism of children and believers is a celebration of God's grace and covenantal promises to those who believe and their children, where we renew our vows and trust God's promises. Baptism symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit beginning a work of faith, the inclusion in a local church family, the washing away of sins through the blood of Christ, and our union with Christ in His death and resurrection.

The second is the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is to be observed only by those who have become followers of Christ. The broken bread symbolizes the broken body of Christ. The cup symbolizes the blood of Christ poured out at the cross for our salvation. Christ is spiritually present in the bread and juice. As we partake of the Supper with an attitude of faith and self-examination, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ, receive spiritual nourishment for our souls, signify our unity with other members of Christ's body, and look forward to the heavenly feast. (Acts 2:39; Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3; Acts 16:30; 1 Corinthians 11:23-29; BC 33-35)

Regarding who may and should participate in Communion... "We welcome all those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life. Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however, eat and drink judgment on themselves." (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 81; 1 Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32)

Paul challenges believers to participate in communion in a manner that is sincere and authentic. He writes to the church in Corinth...

"Eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in the right way. Don't do it in a way that isn't worthy of Him. If you do, you will be guilty. You'll be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone should take a careful look at themselves before they eat the bread and drink from the cup." (1 Corinthians 11:27-28 NIRV)

So, we welcome any who are trusting in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins to participate in the Lord's Supper. If your child understands the above statement, they too are welcome to the table. As well, we want to urge those who trust Jesus to join with us in ministry as Covenant Partners.

ABOUT FINAL THINGS

When history has run the course laid out in God's divine plan, Jesus will visibly return in power and glory to judge the world and to complete his total victory over sin, death and Satan through the resurrection of the dead, the judgment of the just and unjust, and the establishment of His kingdom in the new heavens and earth. Those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord will receive a resurrected body and will live with Him forever, serving God and giving Him unending praise and glory. Those who have not trusted in Christ will be eternally separated from God, enduring eternal punishment for sin. All followers of Christ from all history will be with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for eternity in glorious fellowship. Every tear will be wiped away and death will be swallowed up in victory! (Acts 1:9-11; Mark 14:62; John 14:3; Revelation 1:7; Matthew 16:27; 1 Peter 4:5; Matthew 25:31-56; Revelation 20:11-15; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; Revelation 21:1-5; BC 37)

ABOUT MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

We believe that Christian marriage is a representation of Christ's relationship to His church. (Ephesians 5:21-35) Marriage was ordained by God at creation as the sacred union of one man and one woman. (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:24). All sexual relations must therefore be reserved for that union. Any expression of this gift outside of God's created order is clearly sinful (Romans 3:10-12) and not in accordance with God's plan for sexuality (Hebrews 13:4). While God forgives those who are repentant, (John 3:36; Romans 3:22-24; Colossians 1:15-22; 1 Timothy 2:5-6) He also calls us to leave our sinfulness behind. (John 8:11) While not exhaustive, the following statements articulate the teachings of scripture on important issues today.

We believe **lust**, allowing one's mind to dwell on sexual desires outside of marriage, is sin. (Matthew 5:28; Romans 1:24; Philippians 4:8; 1 Peter 4:3) At the same time, temptation is not sin (Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13), but we are commanded to flee. (Matthew 6:13; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; James 1:13-13)

We believe **pornography** is destructive to the individual, the family, the church and the community and that believers should guard against temptation. (Matthew 27:10; Galatians 5:19)

We believe **fornication**, sexual activity before marriage, is sin. (Proverbs 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:5; 2 Timothy 3:6; Jude 1:4-7; Mark 7:21)

We believe **adultery**, sexual activity with someone other than your spouse, is sin. (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18; Matthew 5:27, 19:1-10, 18; Luke 18:20; Romans 13:9; James 2:11)

We believe **homosexual** activity, sexual activity between members of the same sex, is sin. (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; 1 Kings 14:24; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; Jude 1:7)²

We believe that man was created in **God's image, male and female** (Genesis 1:27, 5:1-2; Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6) Biological sex is an essential part of human identity. If someone's gender identity ("one's internal sense of self") differs from their biological sex, we believe that God still sees them and identifies them according to their biological sex as male or female.³

We believe **singleness** is a good and honorable state (1 Corinthians 7:8) in which one is called to and able to live a virtuous life. (Psalm 51:10, 119:9-16; Romans 6:11-14, 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:13; 2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 5:23-24; Galatians 2:20, 5:16,22-25; Colossians 3:5)

We believe **divorce** is a tragic event permitted when there is sexual infidelity, spousal abuse, or desertion. (Matthew 5:32, 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15) God longs for us to reconcile broken relationships and desires for us to do all we can to live at peace with one another. (Romans 12:18)

We believe **remarriage** is permitted when an innocent party has gone through a divorce (Matthew 5:32), a spouse has died (Romans 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:39), the divorce took place before a salvation experience (2 Corinthians 5:17), or appropriate repentance and restitution has been made (1 John 1:9; Numbers 5:7).

We also believe that **children** are a blessing from the Lord; thus, all human life is sacred and worthy of protection from the moment of conception. (Psalm 127:3-5; 128; 139:13-16; Matthew 18:3; Luke 18:15-17)

We believe **parents** carry the primary responsibility for training their children in Christ's way. (Deuteronomy 4:9-10, 6:4-9, 11:19; Proverbs 22:6; Psalm 78:5; Ephesians 6:4)

We believe all forms of **abuse**, slander, dehumanization, or oppression toward fellow humans is an affront against God's sacred image, which has been stamped upon all people. (Exodus 22:21,23:9; Deuteronomy 23:16; Isaiah 58:6; Jeremiah 22:3; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5; Matthew 5:44; John 13:34; Romans 12:10, 13:8; Galatians 5; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 3:8)

² More information can be found at <https://cmda.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Homosexuality-Ethics-Statement-with-References-FINAL-2016.pdf> and <https://cmda.org/tag/homosexuality/>.

³ This section comes from "Guidance for Churches on Membership, Baptism, Communion, Leadership, Service and Leadership For Trans* People" (*The Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender*, 2021), available at https://www.centerforfaith.com/resources?field_product_category_tid=1. The author, Preston Sprinkle, provides more explanation in "Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say." Additional information can be found at <https://cmda.org/transgender-and-sexual-orientation/>.

OUR ORDINATION OF PASTORS, ELDERS, AND DEACONS

As you have just read, we have expectations of all leaders at Alto Reformed Church. Simply put, all leaders need to guard the mission, purity, and unity of the church.

As part of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, we require all pastors/ministers, elders, and deacons to affirm and sign the “Covenant of the Ordained.” It calls leaders to affirm essentials of the faith, three creeds (which we include in our Covenant Partnership materials), the three reformed confessions, the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality, and the Organizational Convictions of the Alliance. The Covenant and Convictions are attached below. Links to the other documents are under “Your Next Steps” at the end of this section.



COVENANT OF THE ORDAINED (PASTOR, ELDER AND DEACON)

I believe the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, which proclaims the good news of God's salvation through Jesus Christ. The Bible is the essential self-revelation of our Triune God, in whom we have life. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, I submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

I subscribe to the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, I confess my faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout the nations and generations.

I affirm the Belgic Confession and its appendix, the Belhar Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and its appendix, the Great Lakes Catechism on Human Sexuality, and the Canons of Dort as Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose teachings agree with the Word of God. These confessions inform the way I understand the Bible and shape the way we live in response to the gospel. Grateful for these expressions of faith, I promise to be informed by them. I will support these doctrines faithfully in my preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living.

SELECT ONE:

- I simply affirm these reformed confessions. While unable to claim them in full at this time, I commit to studying them and will yield to their teachings.
- I fully subscribe to these reformed confessions. I have studied them and am able to claim them in full. In any place where I have or develop a different opinion than these confessions, I will formally disclose any exceptions to the Alliance of Reformed Churches.

I affirm the Organizational Convictions of the Alliance of Reformed Churches and its included Relational Convictions, Theological Convictions, and Structural Convictions. I offer my support, encouragement, and energy to live into these convictions as an ordained leader in the Alliance. I will honor this covenant for the well-being of myself, the church, and the Alliance of Reformed Churches to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Signed:

Date:

Print Name:



ORGANIZATIONAL CONVICTIONS

Updated 4-5-2022

INTRODUCTORY CONVICTIONS

Denominations and other multi-congregational systems are tools given to the Church by the Spirit for the good of the Kingdom. In different seasons, they provide new and exciting modes of ministry for local communities of faith.

They are not, however, *Biblically mandated*. While unity is the hope of the global church (John 17) and of individual congregations (1 Corinthians 1, 12), and while covenants among believers are important (1 Samuel 20), structural adjustments to the ways that Christian communities interrelate are essential to health and mission (Acts 15).

With this in mind, we return to consider a number of essential questions in today's climate:

What role should an organization of churches serve?

What theology, history, polity, or calling should unite them?

How does covenant – a clear biblical value – inform relationships among churches?

RELATIONAL CONVICTIONS (*Living Together in Christ*)

We are friends and partners in Christ, seeking first the Kingdom of God with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Unity in Jesus – our only hope for salvation – implies praying for one another, celebrating together, encouraging one another, and holding each other accountable.

We are unrelentingly innovative.

In order to remain relevant and engaged with a changing world, we will practice active listening, careful discernment, global attentiveness, and confident creativity in our lives and ministry.

We embrace the diversity of the human experience under obedience to Christ our King.

In doing so, we respond with compassion to the oppressed, we lead with justice in the face of injustice, and we seek in all situations to live out the presence of Christ in people's lives.

THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS (*Renewing Reformed Theology*)

Biblical Authority and Understanding

- We affirm the Bible is the inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God.
- We affirm that we are living within God's redemptive-historical story that is constructed and governed by God's covenants and promises.
- We affirm that understanding the Bible correctly requires use of consistent exegetical principles that include the grammatical/literary, historical, language, and theological dimensions.⁴
- We affirm the illumination of the Holy Spirit as the author of God's Word, the Bible.

Reformed Confessional Theology

- We affirm the Apostles', Athanasian, and Nicene Creeds as a member of the global Church.
- Because their doctrines align with our understanding of God's Word, we affirm the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith. These doctrinal

⁴ Berkhof, Louis (1950). *Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. Baker Book House.

standards help us to understand the Bible, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.

- We affirm the Belhar Confession as an appendix to the Belgic Confession so that the Belhar's contemporary declaration of unity, justice, and equality is framed within the context of the Belgic's view of humanity, Scripture, and God's saving work through Jesus Christ. Founded on these Biblical truths, the Belhar Confession adds its prophetic call for unity and reconciliation to the Church's witness to the world. Christ himself is our peace, tearing down the dividing wall of hostility among all peoples.
- We affirm the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality as a confessional appendix to the Heidelberg Catechism so that its affirmations regarding human sexuality are read within the context of the Heidelberg Catechism's teachings on sin, salvation, and service.
- We affirm that future confessional statements may be adopted as confessional addendums to the Heidelberg Catechism or the Belgic Confessions.

The Church

- We affirm that the church is a sent people, founded and inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- We affirm that the church is the heart of God's mission for the world.
- We affirm that as a sent community, the church is called to multiply. From the earliest days of the church's founding, groups of believers sent out planters to establish new communities of Christian faith where people's lives were transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- We affirm the mission of multiplication as the core mission of every church and will prioritize our resources to continue planting new communities of Christian faith in our generation.

Personal Spiritual Maturity

- We affirm that the call of every relationship, person and leader is to live as a spirit-filled Christian who is growing in spiritual maturity (becoming more like Christ every day).
- We affirm that our primary family of faith is not our family of origin, but rather the body of Christ with whom we "are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord." (Ephesians 2:19-21).

STRUCTURAL CONVICTIONS (*Empowering the Local Church by Shaping Agile Polity*)

Congregational Authority

An organization of churches exists to encourage, equip, and empower the local congregation. To that end, an organization of churches should always be working in a way that develops healthier missional congregations, limits its own ministry reach, and steps in only when there is no local option.

- The core belief of the organization is that men and women are created in God's image and are gifted by the Spirit to equip and lead God's people for ministry.
- We maintain that there are two theologically acceptable positions regarding the interpretation of ordained offices. One position ordains women into the ordained offices of the church. The other limits the ordained offices in which women can serve. We respect each other and each other's congregational choices regarding the nature of ordained leadership.

Theological Education – Pastoral Accountability

We are committed to theological education that is Biblical, Reformed, and that develops leaders who will "equip God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Ephesians 4).

- **The credentials of Congregational/Specialized Pastors, Commissioned Pastors and Teaching Elders** will be granted, held, and supervised by a single ordained ministry oversight board for the purpose of professional/theological accountability.
- People who hold ordination will hold personal membership in a local congregation for the purpose of personal spiritual accountability.

Missional Partnerships

We are committed to local congregations as the primary place to enhance and grow missional effectiveness through local congregational partnerships and relationships.

- This requires the organization to equip, empower, and encourage congregations to find and develop healthy partnerships in ministry.
- There are seasons when congregations can be strengthened utilizing external trainers and coaches. The organization will develop transitional pastors, conflict resolution specialists, vocational coaches, and other ministry resource providers whose core outcome is to increase missional effectiveness in congregations.

Safe Congregations

We are committed to carrying out congregationally-based ministry in the context of emotional and physical safety.

- Congregations of the organization are accountable for utilizing training, policies, and safety procedures that will ensure safe ministry for all.

Organizational Limits

- Guiding Principles will be established for the organization, but the Guiding Principles will not be elevated to a standard of belief.
- Organizational funding will be limited to that needed for organizational leadership and for governing. The organization will intentionally limit its funding to those ministries initiated/identified for partnership support in conversation with collaborative and local congregations.

YOUR NEXT STEP

It's up to you where you go from here...

1. You are encouraged to do more study.

You can read more about our three confessions at <https://canrc.org/beliefs>, the Great Lakes Catechism on Human Sexuality at <https://www.bransonparler.com/catechism-on-marriage-and-sexuality.html>, and the Belhar Confession at <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/contemporary-testimony/confession-belhar>.

2. You are encouraged to ask questions.

We hope this has answered many of your questions, but it has probably raised a host of new questions. You are encouraged to ask the pastor or elders about any of these. Feel free to call the office to set a time to meet.

3. You are encouraged to sign the Leadership Covenant and return it to the office.

Thanks for serving Christ and accepting His call!

Leadership Covenant of Alto Reformed Church

Guiding Scripture

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. (1 Timothy 6:20)

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 2 Timothy 1:14

Our Covenant

We will guard the mission, purity, and unity of the church. (1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 1:14; See Mark 13:5-11,23,33; Matthew 16:6-12; Luke 12:1; Acts 20:31)

Guarding the Mission of the Church - As leaders at Alto Reformed Church, we believe that we are called with others to lead the congregation in fulfilling Christ's mission to know Jesus and make Jesus known. (Philippians 3:10; Romans 15:20) We want to become the best we can be at fulfilling our church's mission within our community. (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) We will seek to do this with faith, hope, and obedience to God. If he takes us down new roads, we will trust him. (Genesis 12:1-9; Hebrews 11:8-19) If he calls us to enable others to do what we are not able to do, we will do that. (Acts 6; 1 Corinthians 12: Ephesians 4:11-12) God's work must progress. We will diligently pray and seek his wisdom to know how far and how fast to go, and what this means for us as individuals and as an entire congregation. (2 Chronicles 7:14; Matthew 7:7-11) At the same time, we recognize that change and progress require us to think new thoughts and consider new methods, just as the Bible says that new wine needs new wineskins. (Matthew 9:17) We recognize that change and improvement issues are subjective, involving varying methods and stylistic tastes. We will strive to be open to new ideas and sincerely weigh the pros and cons, not limiting God by our lack of imagination. We will guard the mission of the church.

Guarding the Purity of the Church - We affirm our Statement of Faith (see www.altoreformedchurch.org/our-beliefs) and commit ourselves to teaching these truths, living within their bounds, and graciously dialoguing with those who disagree. (1 Timothy 3:1-13; 4:16) We understand God forgives repentant sinners (1 John 1:9) and we need not to walk in condemnation and guilt. (Romans 8:1) At the same time, we cannot continue to walk in sin. (Romans 6:1-2) Nor can we remain silent when others fall into sin or heresy. (Jude 1:23) As leaders, we will set an example as transformed Christ-followers (Romans 12:1-2) who are skilled in handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15) and reflect the character of Christ in our attitude (Philippians 2:1-18) and actions. (Galatians 5:16-25) We will guard the truth and purity of the church.

Guarding the Unity of the Church - As servant-hearted leaders, we will seek to model grace and truth in our relationships with one another just as Jesus did. (John 8:1-11) Therefore, we commit ourselves to authentic, loving relationships within this congregation. (John 13:34-35) We agree that the kingdom of God is bigger than any individual or group of people. (John 17:15-23) We earnestly seek to do God's will for our congregation. We will work at setting aside personal agendas. If we see that differences of opinions arise, we agree to seek resolution in a God-honoring, biblical manner. This means going directly to the person(s) with whom we have a concern or disagreement instead of talking about the person behind his/her back. (Matthew 5:22-24; 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 6:1-8) We will esteem, love, and be respectful of others, even if we hold differing ideas or priorities. If we are not able to resolve our differences through face-to-face communication or even with the help of a third person, we agree to part ways without casting blame, pulling others away, or being generally divisive to our local congregation. (Acts 15:2) We will speak well of one another to others, promoting purity, unity and peace within our church family. (1 Thessalonians 5:11) We will be accountable to one another for our conduct, spiritual growth, ministries, and faithful service to God. (James 5:16) We will guard the unity of the church.

We commit ourselves to this covenant.

Elders of Alto Reformed Church

Print Name

Sign Name

Date

(Based on the Pastoral Leadership Team Covenant of Meredith Drive Reformed Church & *How to Change your Church (Without killing it)*, by Alan Nelson & Gene Appel, p. 253)