

SHARON ASSOCIATE REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

BY-LAWS

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Article I. Name and Stated Purpose

- I.A. Sharon Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, hereinafter called SARPC, exists as a local congregation of the church of Jesus Christ, who is the sole head of the Church. SARPC is a member of the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the ARP Church's highest court and under regional governance of Catawba Presbytery. SARPC's purpose is to honor, follow and live out the historic doctrines of the Reformed Christian Faith, and to carry out the Great Commission of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- I.B. We recognize the Church as the body of Christ held together and growing up in him; both as a total fellowship throughout the world and as the local congregation in which believers gather.
- I.C. We acknowledge the commission of Christ to proclaim the Good News to all people making them disciples, and teaching them to obey him; and we acknowledge the command of Christ to love our neighbors, resulting in service to the Church and society, in seeking reconciliation for all with God and their fellows, in proclaiming liberty from every kind of oppression; and in spreading Christ's justice in an unjust world until he comes again. (Matthew 28:18-20)
- I.D. This document supplements, but does not replace, override, contradict or revise the "Holy Bible", our supreme authority, or the "Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church".

Article II. Statement of Faith

We accept and proclaim the historic truths of the Christian faith including the following:

II.A. God and the Human Race

- II.A.1. We, the SARPC, hold that the living God is one God, existing in three distinct persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three are one God, same in substance, equal in power and glory. We hold that He sovereignly fulfills his purpose - in the creation of the heavens and the earth, revelation, redemption, judgment, and the coming of his kingdom — by calling out from the world a people united to himself and to each other in love.
- II.A.2. We acknowledge that God wonderfully and immutably created us as male or female in his own likeness and image, conferring on us dignity and worth and enabling us to respond to him. We are now members of a fallen race; we have sinned and come short of his glory.

- II.A.3. We believe that the Father has shown us his holy love in giving Jesus Christ, his only Son, for us, while through our sinfulness and guilt, we were subject to his wrath and condemnation; and has shown his grace by putting sinners right with himself when they place their trust in his Son.
- II.A.4. We confess Jesus Christ as Lord and God; as truly human, born of the Virgin Mary; as Servant, sinless, full of grace and truth; as only Mediator and Savior, dying on the cross in our place, representing us to God, redeeming us from the grip, guilt and punishment of sin; as victor over Satan and all his forces, rising from death with a glorious body, being taken up to be with his Father, and one day returning personally in glory and judgment to establish his kingdom.
- II.A.5. We believe in the Holy Spirit who convicts the world of guilt in regard to sin, righteousness and judgment; who makes the death of Christ effective to sinners, declaring that they must now turn to Christ in repentance, and directing their trust towards the Lord Jesus Christ, who through the new birth makes us partakers in the life of the risen Christ, illuminating their minds to grasp the truth of Scripture, producing in them his fruit, granting to them his gifts, and empowering them for service in the world.

II.B. The Scriptures

- II.B.1. We believe that the Old and New Testament Scriptures are God-breathed, since their writers spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; hence are fully trustworthy in all that they affirm; non-contradictory; and are our highest authority for faith and life (2 Timothy 3:16-17, II Peter 1:20-21).

Article III. Membership

SARPC's membership policy comes from the "Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Form of Government, V.A and V.B".

- III.A. Definition of a Church Member - A communicant member is one who has made public his profession of faith in Jesus Christ, who has been baptized, and who has submitted to the authority of the Church. The communicant member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the congregation, including:

- III.A.1. Voting in congregational meetings.
- III.A.2. Holding office if qualified as defined in the "Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church".
- III.A.3. Participating in the Sacrament of the Lord's supper
- III.A.4. Presenting his children for the Sacrament of Baptism.

- III.B. Children of Church Members - A non-communicant member is a baptized minor or dependent child of a communicant member of the church. All children of communicant members are entitled to the pastoral care, government, and nurture of the church with a view to entering communicant church membership.

III.C. SARPC Membership Requirements

- III.C.1. Attend regularly and participate in the life of the church for three to six months.
- III.C.2. Submit to preliminary Interview with Session.
- III.C.3. Must successfully complete member training.
- III.C.4. Submit to final interview with Session.
- III.C.5. Accept and sign SARPC Membership Agreement.
- III.C.6. Be formally introduced to the congregation.

III.D. Responsibility of Church Members - Church members are required to:

- III.D.1. Pursue personal growth in the Lord.
- III.D.2. Participate faithfully in the worship and service of the Church.
- III.D.3. Give of one's time, talent and treasure for the welfare of the church.
- III.D.4. Strive to maintain the peace, purity, and fellowship of Christ's church.
- III.D.5. Submit to the authority of the elders.
- III.D.6. Live one's life in a manner consistent with Christian conduct.

Article IV. Marriage, Gender, Morality and Christian Conduct

IV.A. Definition of Marriage - We believe that the term "marriage" has only one meaning, that marriage is created, ordained and sanctioned by God, which joins one biological man and one biological woman in a single, exclusive, monogamous and covenantal union, as delineated in Scripture. (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:22-33) We believe therefore that man does not have authority to alter, modify or redefine what God has decreed. (Deuteronomy 4:2, Revelation 22:18-19)

IV.B. Gender – We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person in His image as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen 1:26-27). Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person. Therefore, we do not accept transgenderism as a Biblical reality since it contradicts God's created order (Gen 1:26-28). Individuals will be addressed by the pronouns of his/her biological sex at birth as created by God.

IV.C. Morality and Christian Conduct

- IV.C.1. We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to only occur between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman.
- IV.C.2. We believe that any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexual conduct, bisexual conduct, pedophilia, bestiality, incest, any use of

pornography or any attempt to change one's gender, or otherwise acting upon any disagreement with one's biological gender, is sinful and offensive to God.

IV.C.3. We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

IV.C.4. We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the doctrines of the church, (Genesis 1:27-28; Genesis 2:18-25; Exodus 20:14; Matthew 19:3-12; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Ephesians 5:22-33; Hebrews 13:4).

IV.D. SARPC Wedding Requirements:

IV.D.1. Marriage is only between one biological male and one biological female.

IV.D.2. The Bride, Groom, or their parents must be a member or regular attender at SARPC.

IV.D.3. Both the Bride and Groom must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

IV.D.4. The engaged couple must live in separate residences until the wedding day.

IV.D.5. The couple will make a commitment not to engage in sexual activity prior to marriage.

IV.D.6. The couple will successfully complete premarital counseling.

IV.D.7. The wedding must be in accordance with SARPC's Statement of Faith and related doctrinal teachings on Biblical marriage (including considerations for divorce and remarriage).

IV.D.8. Any question regarding fulfillment of these requirements shall be resolved by the church leadership.

Article V. Church Government

V.A. General - The government of the SARPC is subject to the provisions of the *Standards of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church*, which comprises the denominational constitution, hereinafter referred to as Standards, and is in adherence with it. Standards provide for a range of flexibility in organizing to meet the varying requirements of churches within the denomination as regards membership size, demographics, Christian maturity, ministries supported, properties managed, and other factors.

V.B. Organization - Churches in the ARPC are governed by boards. Although the standards allow both a Board of Session which members are called "elders" and the main focus is spiritual ministry and a Board of Deacons which main focus is material ministry, the SARPC congregation has chosen to operate with a Session only or "unicameral" system of government which focus includes both spiritual and material

ministry. In addition to the SARPC Session, the SARPC shall also have elected officers serving including the congregation and certain employees.

V.C. Session

- V.C.1. **Role of Session** - The lowest court of the Church, called the Session, is charged with spiritual oversight and governance of an individual congregation within the jurisdiction of a Presbytery. Session may hire employees to perform certain aspects of SARPC business and dismiss same for any reason. Upon the authority from and on behalf of the congregation buy, sell, lease or mortgage property for the congregation. The Session shall accept and execute deeds, manage any special funds so entrusted for the congregation. Additionally, the SARPC Session shall be responsible for tasks normally associated with the diaconate in a bicameral system including the congregation's ministry to those in material need or distress, encouraging the practice of total stewardship among the congregation members, exhibiting a spirit of liberality and hospitality towards fellow saints and the world, caring for the general property of the congregation, and preparing an annual expense budget for ratification by the congregation.
- V.C.2. **Membership of Session**- shall consist of one teaching elder who is the pastor of the SARPC and who shall by virtue of his office serve as moderator of Session and not more than five ruling elders which are elected for a life term by majority vote of the communicant members of the congregation. One ruling elder shall be elected within the board to serve as Clerk of Session whose responsibility is to record minutes from each meeting and keep a hardcopy of same on acid free paper in a permanent binding.
- V.C.3. **Qualifications to Serve** - The office of elder as set forth in the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3, Titus 1) is ordinary and perpetual in the ARPC. In both the Old Testament and New Testament church, God ordained elders to govern and discipline his people. Members shall be chosen men of wisdom, discretion, sound faith and godly life, and are qualified under the standards recorded in Scripture. An elder shall be a member in good standing of the congregation, regular in attendance, actively sharing in the worship and service of the Church, and giving particular emphasis to the duties of his office. It is the responsibility of elders, both individually and jointly, to guard and promote the spiritual welfare of the congregation. Elders should be called by God to serve and should seek the will of God in all decisions by Session.

Additionally, elders in the SARPC unicameral system shall possess the additional qualifications normally expected of deacons, individuals who are faithful, diligent Christians, of good character, honest repute, exemplary life, brotherly love, sympathetic nature, sound judgment, and who are qualified under the standards recorded in Scripture.

V.C.4. **Requirements** - to be a candidate for election as ruling elder, male members of the congregation must meet the qualifications listed above and be willing to:

V.C.4.a. Feel called by God to serve

V.C.4.b. Be willing to:

V.C.b.i. Serve a life term

V.C.b.ii. Attend at least ten (10) elder meetings in a year

V.C.b.iii. Attend synod

V.C.b.iv. Attend presbytery

V.C.5. **Election of Ruling Elder** - The process for electing a ruling elder shall be:

V.C.5.a. **Nomination** - Candidates shall be nominated from the floor during a congregational meeting. The names of candidates will be drawn from the roll of communicant male members. Anyone who joins SARPC and has served as elder or deacon in another church will be eligible after one (1) year.

V.C.5.b. **Validation** - In a separate meeting, each candidate nominated shall be interviewed individually by the Session to validate that qualifications and requirements to serve are met. Session shall prayerfully determine which candidates' names shall be placed on the ballot for possible election to elder. *A nominee's name may be withheld if Session determines that nominee is not yet qualified or fails to meet the requirements for serving.*

V.C.5.c. **Election** - Session shall call a congregational meeting for the purpose of electing elder(s) from the ballot provided by Session.

V.C.5.d. **Ordination and Installation** - The pastor of SARPC shall preside over the service of ordination and installation of newly elected elders. At the time of the ordination and installation service, the officers-elect shall present themselves before the congregation, and shall solemnly promise, according to the formula prescribed in Standards to maintain the doctrine, government, discipline, and worship of the ARPC.

V.C.6. Meetings – shall be held monthly or more often as needed at a time and place suitable to all members.

V.D. Congregation

V.D.1. The SARPC congregation is a company of Christians, with their children, associated together according to the Scriptures for worship and ministry in the name of Christ, subscribing to a form of church government as defined herein, and choosing and ordaining some to perform selected ministries.

V.D.2. The purpose of a congregation is to glorify God by conducting public corporate worship, bringing the lost to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, building them

up in the Christian faith, and preparing them for Christian service. The membership shall consist of communicant and non-communicant members.

- V.D.3. The congregation shall be responsible for electing elders and officers, approving calls to ministry, annual budget ratification, ratifying changes to by-laws and other business as may occur at the annual meeting or presented by Session.
- V.D.4. The congregation shall have such organizations as are necessary and desirable for the edification of the Church. Each organization shall be responsible to Session.
- V.D.5. The annual meeting of the congregation shall be held during January of each year on a date established by Session and announced at least two weeks in advance.

Article VI. OFFICERS

- VI.A. General – Officers, unless specified otherwise, shall be elected by communicant members of the congregation at the annual congregational meeting for a term of one (1) year and may be reelected. The names of the officers to be elected will be drawn from the Roll of Communicant Members who attend worship services regularly and have a regular system of contributing. They must be at least 21 years old, have good moral standards, and meet the criteria in scripture of II Timothy 3 and Titus 1.
- VI.B. Congregational Chairman may or may not be an ordained officer. He shall preside at the annual meeting of the Congregation and all other congregational meetings which are called for business purposes.
- VI.C. Congregational Secretary shall be the Clerk of the Session, or if the Clerk cannot serve, the Session shall appoint another person to serve in place of the Clerk. He shall keep a record of all business meetings of the congregation and shall file a duplicate record with the Clerk of Session. He shall keep all papers that pertain to the business of the congregation except those confided to Session.
- VI.D. Congregational Treasurer may or may not be an ordained officer. He shall perform all duties incident to the office of treasurer for SARPC and such other duties as may be assigned by Session including but not limited to:
 - VI.D.1. Have custody of all funds and securities.
 - VI.D.2. Keep full and accurate account of receipts and moneys and other valuables and to the credit at such depository or depositories as may be designated by Session.
 - VI.D.3. Disburse funds as may be ordered by Session, taking proper vouchers for disbursements, and paying only by check.
 - VI.D.4. Maintain financial records in a form suitable for audit,
 - VI.D.5. Facilitate an annual internal financial audit as directed by Session.
 - VI.D.6. Prepare accurate and meaningful financial reports for Session at least monthly.

- VI.D.7. Provide financial reports to State, Federal and Municipal governments as required by laws and regulations.
- VI.D.8. Perform all duties incident to the office of treasurer and such other duties as may be assigned by Session.
- VI.D.9. Shall be bonded.

Article VII. Discipline

- VII.A. The purpose of discipline is to bring about the reconciliation of man to God and man to man and to engage the people of God in the ministry of reconciliation, and to promote the peace, purity, and edification of the Church; to redirect and restore wayward believers into proper Christian conduct. Under the rule of Christ expressed through the Church, discipline is that submission that frees the Christian for more effective service. Such service by the Church in the world demands a disciplined individual and corporate life. Each Christian is to submit to church government in order that the body of believers is responsible for each individual and group in the church. In this mutual responsibility, each individual and group is finally responsible not to a church court, but to God. The rule of discipline is not rigid but open to change that will better accomplish this mission according to the Scriptures.
- VII.B. In this context of discipline, the Church, under the authority of the Lord, disciplines or guides, instructs, and controls its members and courts to enable them to serve God more effectively. The exercise of discipline is made necessary by the need more fully to reconcile Christian individuals or groups to God and one another, to prevent mercy from becoming a soft and finally cruel indulgence, and to control those whose words and actions may seriously hinder the witness of the whole body of Christ. Whereas each Christian has a responsibility for discipline, corporate discipline exercised in the name of the Church is to be undertaken only by the church courts of session, presbytery, and General Synod.
- VII.C. In each situation the court must also be aware that it is fallible being made up of sinful men. The court will search for any ways in which what the court has done or failed to do has contributed to the problem requiring discipline. In the event the court is found in error, the court will seek contrite repentance and forgiveness and endeavor to be more responsible. The court will constantly seek the will of the Lord through the Scriptures and prayer.
- VII.D. Court proceedings will be kept in confidence by all parties involved. The criterion for corrective discipline is the teaching of the Scriptures and the Standards of the ARP Church. Every effort will be made to accomplish any needed restraint by constructive criticism and verbal persuasion. If these means fail, then necessary censures will be employed in proportion to the offense according to Matthew 18:15-18.

- VII.E. In all things, the church court shall seek the repentance and restoration of the individual or group involved consistent with the higher responsibility of the court to carry on Christ's work in the most effective way.
- VII.F. Original jurisdiction over church members, including non-communing members, and over elders and deacons as officers, is vested in the session of SARPC. Original jurisdiction over ministers is vested in the presbytery to which they belong.

Article VIII. **Miscellaneous**

- VIII.A. By-Laws may be amended by 2/3 vote of the members present at any business meeting if proper notice of the proposed amendments were given in the call of the meeting. When not otherwise prescribed, Roberts Rules of Order shall govern all proceedings of the congregational meeting.