

CONSTITUTION OF TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Valparaiso, FL, CREC

1. PREAMBLE

All authority in Heaven and on earth belongs to Jesus Christ, Who, at the Father's right hand rules and teaches His Church through His Word and Holy Spirit by the ministry of men rightly administering His Word, sacraments, and discipline; thus exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, for the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of our church's existence is to fulfill Christ's mission of gathering the nations into His Kingdom and maturing them into His obedient and faithful people, through means of Word, sacrament, prayer, and service, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. At the center of our church's life is gathered worship, in which God renews covenant with us and gives us His gifts.

3. GOVERNMENT & DENOMINATIONAL COMMITMENT

Christ has given to His Church decent and orderly patterns of government, community, and worship, for the maturing of His people and the manifestation of His glory in the world. Seeking fidelity to these Biblical patterns, Trinity Presbyterian Church, Valparaiso FL (TPC) has been so constituted by Christ through His duly ordained representatives as a particular Presbyterian church in the Reformed tradition. We hold to a representative, hierarchical, conciliar form of government. The church is ruled by the Session, which consists of men ordained to the offices of Pastor and Ruling Elder, as described elsewhere in this constitution.

As a local congregation, TPC may choose its own officers (in conjunction with the approval of Presbytery in the case of Ministers of Word and Sacrament); admit, transfer, remove, or excommunicate members; withdraw from the CREC and pursue a different denominational connection at any time; revise its constitution; and possess its own property. This constitution itself is a fallible human product. As such, members are not expected to agree with every detail, but are required to be willing to live under its terms.

For the purpose of manifesting our oneness in Christ, as well as mutually cooperative shepherding, oversight, accountability, discipline, and mission, TPC is a member of the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches (CREC) and accepts all the constitutional requirements that come with this affiliation. However, our desire for mutual ministry and mission is not limited to the churches of our Presbytery or Denomination/Communion.

Should TPC ever desire to leave the CREC for another denominational affiliation, TPC may do so with the Session's unanimous approval and a two-thirds majority vote at a heads of household meeting [see section 11]. Such an action should only ever take place in a peaceable and orderly manner, treating our brethren with respect, and with a commitment to joining another association of faithful churches as soon as possible.

4. INCORPORATION

As a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, TPC is not constituted or incorporated by anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Head of the Church.

5. MEMBERSHIP

At TPC, membership is normally reckoned by household. A household may be eligible for membership when the head, ordinarily the husband and/or father, has been lawfully baptized in God's Triune name and does not contradict his profession by his manner of life. Persons from non-member households may also join the church individually.

Membership begins when membership vows have been taken and the individual or household are received into membership by the unanimous vote of the Session, who oversee TPC's membership list.

It is the desire of TPC to respect the authority of other churches as much as possible. Applicants for membership by incoming transfer will normally be added to the TPC member list after communication has been established with their former congregation. If no reply is made in thirty days, the transfer may proceed at the Session's discretion. No recipient of any form of water baptism administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is to be rebaptized. If the prospective member has been under discipline in another congregation, a full investigation is to be made and the Session shall issue a ruling before admittance to membership.

Children born to or under the guardianship of at least one member parent become members of TPC at their baptisms. As children of member households transition to adulthood, the Session will inquire about the person's membership commitment and apply the policies of individual membership to them [taking into consideration factors such as parental desires, church attendance, higher educational pursuits, financial independence, spiritual maturity, and marital status]. The result of this review will be to continue to consider them as members of their parents' household, release them from our care, or reckon them as individual members [a separate head of household].

Households including unbaptized children may be received into TPC's membership, though unbaptized children are not counted as members of TPC until their baptisms. Such parents should be encouraged to give careful consideration to TPC's position with regard to the covenant standing of their children.

6. NATURE AND LIMITS OF MEMBERSHIP

Membership at TPC is a matter of Christian discipleship and spiritual shepherding. No members have contract, property or civil legal rights in the property or other ministry affairs of the church. In accord with TPC's membership vows, if a member contradicts his profession of faith, or departs from a life of Christian repentance and obedience, refusing to live in a manner that becomes a follower of Christ, he may come under various forms of disciplinary censure from the Session up to excommunication from the Christian Church. By their membership vows, and in obedience to Scripture [1 Cor 6], all TPC

members commit to strive for the peace and purity of the congregation by their words and deeds. All members agree to submit to the Session of Elders as the God-appointed governing authority of the congregation, and expressly waive any and all rights in law and equity to bringing any civil disagreement before a court of law. All personal disputes between members or members and the church are to be resolved by Biblically-based processes involving Christian mediation and counsel exclusively.

7. RELEASE OF MEMBERSHIP

If any member requests transfer to the care of another Christian church, the Session will release him with a blessing, except as noted below. If members cease regular attendance in order to seek a new church home, or relocate from our geographical area, they are charged to transfer their membership to a Christian church within six months and given a letter of commendation for that purpose. Besides exceptional cases such as those involving some college students, military personnel, shut-ins, missionaries, or evangelists, any member absent from regular worship attendance for six months will be dismissed from membership at the Session's discretion. When members request release while under church discipline, the Session will delay acting on the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved. The matter can be resolved by acquittal, repentance, censure, or excommunication; or, if the TPC Session is reasonably confident the receiving church will continue the disciplinary process in a Biblical manner, the member may be released into the pastoral care of that church, with a complete report of the matter passed along to the governance of that church.

8. CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Church discipline is ordinarily positive and informal. The most common form of discipline within the church is congregational, member to member, exhorting and encouraging one another to live according to the rule of Christ, overlooking the failures of others in love (1 Peter 4:8) and continually stirring each other up to charity and good works (Hebrews 10:19-25). Members are exhorted from the Word, shepherded by Godly counsel, and encouraged to self-discipline.

Formal church discipline is applied through the formal action and judgment of the Session. Except in cases of scandal requiring immediate action, the pattern of church discipline will generally include private informal confrontation, private formal admonishment by two or three witnesses (Mt. 18:16), formal public admonishment, and a formal hearing which may result in censure or excommunication (Mt. 18:17). Excommunication should ordinarily be a public act of the Church (1 Cor. 5:4-5). Repentance always terminates the church discipline process and restores the offender. Public sins may still call for public censure and/or public confession, as the Session sees fit, even if the offender is repentant.

While following these general Biblical principles, the Session shall establish the specific procedures and timelines for all formal discipline on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate to the circumstances and individuals involved. However, at minimum these procedures should include a clear and timely warning to the individual that they may be subject to formal discipline, two or three visits or communications involving two or three witnesses, and clear records and/or minutes of the entire proceedings kept by the Session. The Session should only move to the next step in the disciplinary process with great care and after much prayer.

Disciplinary procedures should include informing the accused of the specific charges, the time, place, and date of the hearing, and ample time for the accused to prepare a defense or to repent.

At the hearing, one of the Elders will give a solemn charge from the Scriptures on the responsibilities of those present, the evidence against the accused will be presented, and the accused will have time to make a reasonable defense, including the right to question any witnesses (as the Session deems fit). At a separate, subsequent meeting of the Session, after prayerful consideration, a vote will be taken on each of the charges presented.

The Session will keep all records pertaining to the hearing. Though, because of their nature, records of Sessional meetings and business are not normally publicly available, the accused will be given a copy of these records should he request them.

9. EXCOMMUNICATION

Occasionally, the gravity and severity of an offense, combined with an open refusal to repent or indifference on the part of the offender, may require the Session to move immediately towards excommunication apart from the intervening steps described above, but generally the offender should be patiently given every opportunity to repent before being cut off. In cases where a member shows contempt for the Session by refusing to cooperate with the disciplinary process, his name may be erased from the membership of the church with an appropriate degree of censure, including a declaration of excommunication if deemed appropriate.

When an excommunication is decided upon by unanimous vote of the Session, the Session will communicate the outcome to the congregation on an appointed Lord's Day, following an appropriate exhortation (1 Cor. 5:4-5). The Session will remind the congregation to refrain from self-righteous judgments, unloving gossip, or other forms of hurtful speech and how to best express love to those involved in the disciplinary action. The congregation will also be reminded that church discipline aims at the glory of God, whose honor is tarnished when the people who bear His name live sinfully; the restoration of the offender; the prevention of similar falls on the part of other Christians; and the peace and purity of the body of Christ.

Excommunication ends when, in the evaluation of the Session, the one under discipline has repented. The restoration of fellowship shall be joyfully and formally announced to the congregation along with a confession or statement of repentance being read at the Session's discretion.

10. APPEALS

Members or excommunicants of TPC may appeal the actions of the Session to the Presbytery and/or council of the CREC, in accord with the CREC Constitution. Appeals should be made in a timely fashion (normally within 30 days of the verdict being enacted) and the TPC Session should be notified in writing, along with the Presbytery or other relevant courts. All parties should agree to abide by decisions rendered by broader courts of the Church, even as we acknowledge that such courts are fallible and perfect justice will not be administered until the Lord does so at the final judgment.

11. GOVERNMENT AND MEMBER VOTING

TPC's church governance is representative through Elders elected to serve as members of the governing body, called the 'Session'. Although heads of household votes are rare, Elders are nevertheless expected to seek the counsel and input of each TPC family, prior to making important decisions. Should they elect to do so, the Session may defer certain matters to a vote of the head of household.

Those critical occasions where voting, or the position of member families is made known to the Session, will be accomplished by the heads of member households. Single members no longer living under the direct authority of their parent(s), and widows, are considered a household for voting purposes.

For any vote, the Session must provide at least two week's notice prior to a duly called meeting of each head of household in verbal and printed Sunday announcements. Such meetings must take place on TPC property and ample time allotted for questions and discussion before the actual vote is conducted. Each meeting should open and close in prayer. At least two-thirds of the congregation's head of household membership must be present as a quorum for a vote. A passing vote requires the affirmation of two-thirds of those voting. Absentee voting via proxy is not allowed.

12. OFFICERS AND ORDINATION

TPC's form of government includes and makes provision for the following ordinary and perpetual offices: Pastor/Teaching Elder (Minister of Word and Sacrament), Ruling Elder, and Deacon.

Pastor

Pastor, or Teaching Elder, is an office of Word and Sacrament, subject to the successful completion of a Presbyterial examination prior to their call, the New Covenant counterpart to the Old Covenant priesthood, even as each local congregation is a miniature fulfillment of the typology of the Temple.

Ruling Elder

Ruling Elder is an office of service and rule, not subject to Presbyterial examinations regarding their call to office. As elders joined with the priests and Levites in the government of the Jewish Church in Old Covenant Israel, so Teaching and Ruling Elders co-labor together in shepherding the flock as members of the same Session (1 Pet. 5:2-4), but differ in respect to personal calling, gifts, function, and (strictly speaking) office. Both Teaching and Ruling Elders may serve as representatives of the church in Presbytery and council meetings. While only Pastors ordinarily administer Word and Sacrament, in times of necessity or in the absence of an ordained Pastor, the Pastor of TPC or Moderator of Presbytery may appoint a Ruling Elder to administer.

Deacon

Deacon is an office of service and stewardship, under the oversight of the Session. Deacons are assistants to the Elders, just as the Levites assisted the priests, with a special calling to minister mercy

and meet practical needs. The Diaconate may also serve as a preparation for Eldership, to test a man's gifts, gain experience and boldness, and prove his faithfulness.

Congregational Committees

The Session may create temporary committees of men and women within the congregation to provide service and give assistance to the officers.

13. CHURCH OFFICERS AND EMPLOYEES: Organization, Procedures, and Responsibilities

The Session

Ordinarily, the church should be ruled by a plurality of qualified Elders. The Pastor is the default moderator of the Session, responsible for calling and overseeing meetings, unless that role is delegated to another Elder. Another Elder shall serve as Clerk of Session responsible for Sessional documents, minutes, and official communications. The Clerk is elected by the Session to a two-year term and may serve unlimited consecutive terms.

The Session must meet at least quarterly. Each Elder has one vote. In the Session, decisions are made and motions enacted by simple majority vote, unless otherwise stated in this Constitution.

In matters unaddressed by the Creeds, Confession, and CREC, the TPC Session is considered the congregation's sole governing body and will be held responsible to make authoritative Scriptural interpretations as they pertain to questions of morality and church life. The Session constitutes the church's legal representatives, or trustees, and as such, may act on the church's behalf; hire and dismiss church staff; approve the annual budget and expenditure policies; and make decisions about church property. The Session should plan at least one head of household meeting a year, to update the congregation on the life of the church and budgetary matters.

The Session may only hire staff whose manner of life and theological convictions are in line with TPC's overall vision and mission. TPC does not discriminate in employment with regard to race, color, or national origin. In line with Biblical requirements and historical precedent (1 Tim. 2:11-15; 3:1-7), only men of sufficient age and maturity will be considered for pastoral positions (ie. Pastor, Associate Pastor, or assistant). Any employees may be dismissed for conduct or beliefs inconsistent with TPC's doctrinal and ethical standards, as well as failure to adequately perform their assigned responsibilities. The Session bears full responsibility for making such judgments. In all these ways, the Elders act jointly, not severally, under the oversight and leadership of the Pastor.

All church-related concerns and complaints should be brought to the attention of the Session. A member should present concerns that are grave in nature to an Elder for consideration by the Session. All members of the church are welcomed and invited to call upon the Session (or any individual member thereof) for special counsel, prayer, or confession of sin and assurance of forgiveness.

The Session is responsible for sending the Pastor and one additional delegate to all CREC Presbytery and council meetings, in accord with the CREC constitution. The Pastor is a permanent delegate to all higher

courts, though he may choose to send a substitute in extenuating circumstances. The delegate in addition to the Pastor may be chosen by a vote of the Session. Delegates are to vote their conscience at higher assemblies, but should also consider the desires and will of the entire TPC Session.

The Diaconate

The Diaconate is the body of Deacons. The Diaconate must meet at least twice a year. In the Diaconate, decisions are made and motions enacted by simple majority vote. The Diaconate should elect a Head Deacon to serve a two-year term. The Head Deacon is responsible for organizing the Diaconate, calling and overseeing meetings, ensuring minutes are recorded, and serving as a liaison between the Diaconate, the Session, and the congregation. The Diaconate is also responsible to elect a Treasurer to a two-year term to make necessary and accurate financial reports, if one is not provided or appointed by the Session. The Treasurer does not have to be a church officer, provided another member of the congregation is willing and able to serve in this capacity. There is no limit to the number of consecutive terms Head Deacons and Treasurers may serve. The Session may replace the individual in either position at any time.

The Session and Diaconate may conduct business via email, video/conference call, and other electronic means, provided there is participation from all members, equivalent to that of meetings held physically in person. However business is conducted, passed motions should be incorporated into the official record of that body's minutes.

The Consistory

A joint officer meeting of all Elders and Deacons together ("Consistory") may be held periodically under the oversight of the Pastor.

14. SELECTION AND CALLING OF OFFICERS

Nominations to any church office may be submitted to any Elder at any time. In the case of a Pastor, all CREC procedures for calling a Pastor shall be followed. At the Session's discretion, nominees for any office will normally be required to undergo some training and examination. Under the oversight of the Pastor, the Session will examine a nominee about his manner of life and doctrine.

All men must meet the general character qualifications for office set down in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:2-4). He must also make known any disagreement or reservation about any portion of the church's doctrinal views as expressed in this Constitution and the Westminster Standards. The Session will determine if these exclude him from office. If an officer later changes his views on some matter that would require taking an exception to the Constitution, honesty and integrity require that he disclose this change as soon as possible for a ruling about his continued fitness for the office. Pastors should notify the Session and Presbytery; other officers should notify the Session. Following the time of training and examination, and after consulting heads of households and carefully considering any concerns, the nominee may be approved by a unanimous vote of the Session.

Any nominee not approved by the Session may request a list of deficiencies or areas of concern from them, stated in Biblical terms, and a proposed course of action for remedying these concerns.

Should the church ever be without a Pastor, it should strive to secure one without delay (Mt. 9:36). The Elders may form a pastoral search committee including members of the congregation to help in the work of identifying and recommending suitable nominees. The Elders will examine a nominee with regard to his doctrine, manner of life, and confessional adherence. Following this process, the Elders may approve the nominee as a candidate to be placed on a ballot. Heads of household will be asked whether or not a call to the pastorate should be extended to him; the ballot will include an option to abstain. After consulting heads of households and carefully considering any concerns, the Elders will extend a provisional call to him to be Pastor. His call to be Pastor is finalized only after the CREC's Presbytery duly approves him. Following CREC approval, he may be ordained (if necessary) and installed as Pastor. (It is also lawful for the candidate to be examined by the Presbytery before a vote of the heads of households. In such cases, the congregation's call is not provisional.)

Ordination

Ordination is the solemn setting apart of a person to some particular, public Church office. Ordination is a ritual of the Church through which the Spirit confers all the privileges and obligations of the office to which the man has been called. Every officer is to be ordained by the imposition of hands, and prayer, by a body of Elders representing the Presbytery and congregation. Officers are only to be ordained into a particular office one time. If a man has already been ordained to office in another local church, he is to be installed, rather than re-ordained. If ordained into an office but then called and elected to a different office, he should be ordained into the different office.

15. RESIGNATION & REMOVAL FROM CHURCH OFFICE

Resignation

All officer resignations follow the same pattern. For cases that do not involve moral failures or disciplinary proceedings, the resignation is as follows: The officer may submit his resignation to the Session. If the Session accepts his resignation, he is relieved of his office. If the Session does not accept his resignation, he may tender it again at the next Session meeting, or after at least one month has passed, whichever is later, in which case it must be accepted and the congregation notified. If the resignation is sought for reasons of moral or doctrinal irregularity, then the resignation will not be a substitute for any appropriate Biblical discipline.

Removal

Members are urged to be extremely reluctant to bring charges against any officer, covering over offenses and overlooking shortcomings in a spirit of brotherly love, and remembering what the Bible says about those who bear false testimony and judge others (especially rulers) harshly. If two or three witnesses believe an Elder or Deacon to be morally or doctrinally unfit for office, then they may present charges to the Session (1 Tim. 5:19). If a 2/3 majority of the Session (excluding the accused from voting)

decides that the question is worthy of an investigation and/or hearing, at their discretion they may inform the congregation of the charges, announce the date(s) of the scheduled investigation and/or hearing, and encourage members (especially heads of households) to attend. If the charges are sustained by the other Elders after investigation/hearing, then the accused officer, depending on the gravity of the charges and his response to correction, may be rebuked by the Session (1 Tim. 5:20), or may be removed from office (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9), or both, also by 2/3 majority Sessional vote. If the charges prove to be untrue and therefore slanderous, those who brought them may be subject to discipline by the Session.

Appeal

In any case of removal from office, the officer may appeal the judgment within thirty days of the action to the CREC courts for binding arbitration, according to the provisions of the CREC Constitution, if he believes the congregation or Session has acted without sufficient warrant. The Session should always notify the congregation of changes in the status of an officer, as soon as reasonably possible.

Sabbatical

While Church offices are ordinarily perpetual and lifelong, sometimes officers desire to take a leave of absence for various reasons. If so, he will present his request to the Session. The length of a sabbatical should be agreed upon by the officer and the Session. Even while on sabbatical, the officer holds his office, but he is not expected to carry the ordinary workload in the life of the church. This change of status should then be communicated to the congregation.

Interim Appointments

If TPC is without a Pastor, it should seek the aid of Presbytery so that a regular ministry of the Word and celebration of the Sacraments may continue. No man not ordained to be a Minister of Word and Sacrament may take upon himself the task of preaching apart from the permission of the Session, or the task of regularly administering the Sacraments apart from permission and appointment by the Moderator of Presbytery. It is crucial that the offices and order of the church be maintained even in times of transition.

Emeritus Officers

Officers may be granted emeritus status from the Session as a way of honorably resigning from office. The Session can make any officer "emeritus" with a two-thirds vote. Emeritus officers hold an emeritus title, and may still engage in the work of the church (including preaching and administering the sacraments as requested by the Session), consulted by the other officers for wisdom, and are worthy of honor for their time of active and official service to the church, but are no longer voting members of the Session or Diaconate and are relieved of their official duties.

Pastoral Assistant and Associate Pastor

As need and resources dictate, TPC may call a man to serve as a Pastoral Assistant or Associate Pastor. The assistant is to be called by the Session and after examination by the Session may be hired. An assistant does not have a vote on the Session, and may not serve as a delegate to a higher court. An Associate Pastor is called in the same manner as a Pastor. He becomes a member of the Session and may be a delegate to a higher court. Job responsibilities for assistants and associates are to be determined by the Session, under the oversight and leadership of the Pastor.

16. LITURGY AND SACRAMENTS

Worship

The Lord's Day worship service of Trinity Presbyterian Church is understood to be a service of renewing the covenantal relationship between God and His people. Thus, the order of our worship follows the Biblical pattern of Call, Confession, Consecration, Communion, and Commission.

Baptism

TPC adheres to the baptismal doctrine and practice contained in the Westminster Standards. However, we recognize that some individuals may differ on questions of baptism while still falling within the confessional breadth of the CREC. Such individuals may become members at the Session's discretion [see Membership section]. Historically, baptisms have been administered by aspersion, affusion [pouring], and immersion. But baptisms at TPC will only be administered by affusion. TPC recognizes the validity of all water baptisms performed in the Triune name of God and the Session may accommodate members who desire the mode of immersion by putting them in contact with local gospel ministers willing and able to administer an immersion baptism for them.

The Lord's Supper

While the concept of "worthy" reception as found in the Westminster Standards implies a participant's cognizant, expressible knowledge of the meaning of the Lord's Supper as a prerequisite for admittance to His Table, we take exception to this teaching from our confessional documents. Instead, TPC practices a discriminating form of "open communion." That is, we encourage all baptized Christians, regardless of age or cognitive ability, (in good standing, not excommunicated) to celebrate the Lord's Supper and so commune with Christ in His body.

We find Scriptural warrant for including a child whom the Lord has placed in His Covenant and made holy through baptism, in the covenant nurture of Holy Communion. We believe it consistent that as a child feeds on the word of Christ in the Church and in the family, he also feed upon Christ spiritually in communion.

17. DISSOLUTION

Trinity Presbyterian Church, as a local congregation, may be dissolved by the unanimous vote of the Session and two-thirds vote of the heads of households. In the event of dissolution, all of the church's

debts shall be fully paid and any remaining assets and holdings designated by the Session to other churches or ministries as are in general agreement with TPC's doctrinal outlook.

18. AMENDING THE CONSTITUTION

We confess that this Constitution is a fallible work of fallible men. This Constitution may be amended at any time with the consent of at least 2/3rds of the Session. Such votes require two weeks' notice to each Session member. Prior to the Sessional vote, the reasons for the proposed changes should be clearly communicated to the congregation, then ample time given to discuss said changes in a head of household meeting.

19. CONFESSIONAL STANDARD

The foundational governing document of Trinity Presbyterian Church is the Word of God as found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Subordinate to Scripture we hold to the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as well as the Definitions of Chalcedon. Our Confessional standards are The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646-7) and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, as amended herein. Members of TPC do not have to personally subscribe to the Westminster Standards, however as a Reformed Church, our officers are required to, with stated exceptions.

20. RATIFICATION AND AMENDMENTS

This Constitution was ratified by the Session of Elders on 30 June 2019, replacing entirely all prior governing documents of Trinity Presbyterian Church.

21. APPENDIX

Marriage Definition and Policies

The following points of clarification relate to chapter 24 of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

All references to man and woman are understood as natural-born man and natural-born woman. Elective sex change operations and all similar efforts are considered an abomination to God and a sinful rebellion against His will for us as He has made it known Providentially by the circumstances of our physical creation.

Any form of marriage between two individuals who were born naturally as members of the same sex is considered unlawful and prohibited by God's Word [Romans 1.24-27; 1 Corinthians 6.9]. Such marriages can never be made lawful by any law of man or consent of parties, and are therefore included in the prohibition of WCF 24.4.

The "Papists" referenced to in WCF 23.3 are understood, not as all Roman Catholics in general, but as any member of an Eastern or Western church who holds so exclusively to his own ecclesiastical identify that he anathematizes the members of TPC for our beliefs and practices.

In accord with WCF 24.6, members who pursue civil divorce “of their own wills and discretion” may be subject to church discipline up to and including excommunication for being in violation of their marriage vows, which were entered into after having invoked God's holy name. Any member considering divorce must first seek counsel and approval from the TPC Session. In our understanding, “willful desertion” may include neglect, abuse, and other forms of severe abandonment or high-handed dereliction of spousal duties to such a degree that it is deemed a functional denial of the faith [1 Tim 5.8].

In light of these principles, the Session of TPC adopts the following policy: Our church building and property are not to be used to host any ceremonies inconsistent with the Biblical teaching on marriage, nor is our pastoral staff to be involved with such ceremonies. No marriage between a believer and an unbeliever, nor marriages involving unlawfully divorced persons with outstanding obligations to their former spouse, nor ceremonies between a same sex couple is to be performed on TPC’s property. Further, the Session forbids TPC ministers from conducting or participating in any such services.