



Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals (F.I.R.E.) Constitution

Article 1: Name

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

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

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

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

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

Article 2: Purposes of this Association

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

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

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

Article 3: The Standards of the Association

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

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

1. The doctrinal statement of the Association may be revised upon agreement of three-fourths of the delegates representing member churches at the Annual Association Meeting.

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

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

2. Churches which differ from the doctrinal statement must inform the moderator, who will then inform other member churches who will determine whether any action is necessary.

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

Article 4: Membership in the Association

A. Application for membership:

1. Churches applying for membership in the Association must:

- a. Be in agreement with the doctrinal statement of the Association. Any exceptions must be noted when applying (see 4.A.2 below).

- b. Be recommended by at least one member church by letter.

- c. Agree to abide by the Constitution of the Association.
 - d. Send representatives to at least one national or regional FIRE Conference prior to making application.
 - e. Submit a written application to the Moderator, who will circulate the application among member churches for comment and approval.
2. Churches which note an exception to the Association's doctrinal statement or which have distinctive practices that would likely be considered uncommon may be admitted by the following procedure:
 - a. Any exceptions or distinctive practices should be noted and explained at the time the church makes application. Applications noting exceptions or distinctive practices will be referred to an Executive Committee consisting of the Moderator, Moderator *pro tem*, and Secretary.
 - b. The Executive Committee will consider the exception(s) or distinctive practices and may ask the officers of the church to review relevant books or other materials before the Annual Meeting.
 - c. The representatives of the church will be given opportunity to explain their views and to answer questions at the Annual Meeting.
 - d. The church may be received into membership upon a three-fourths vote of the delegates of member churches at the Annual Meeting. An asterisk next to their names in the Association's directory will identify churches received with exceptions or distinctive practices. Churches received into membership with exceptions or distinctive practices shall not proselytize or become contentious about their differences.
3. A new or prospective member church will make a presentation at an Association meeting to tell about themselves and to answer any relevant questions that representatives may have.
4. Applicant churches which meet the qualifications for membership may be approved by a consensus of the representatives of the member churches as determined by the moderator. Voting may be at the Annual Meeting or by other means such as mail, fax or e-mail if an application is received during the year. If an application is not unanimously approved, it shall be decided by a three-fourths vote of member churches at an Association

meeting. Applications by churches noting exceptions to the Association's doctrinal statement can *only* be considered at the Annual Meeting.

5. Approved churches will be inducted publicly into the FIRE association at the next national FIRE Conference to which it can send representatives.

6. Overseas churches or individuals will be received by attending at least one national FIRE Conference before applying but may be inducted through a representative from their sponsoring church at a subsequent national FIRE Conference if they are unable to attend within a reasonable period of time. It will be the responsibility of the applying church/individual or their sponsoring church to make a request in writing to the Board concerning when they desire to be inducted and by whom.

7. In exceptional cases, the Board may recommend that a church or individual be received into membership without having previously attended a conference, or without being able to attend the conference at which they are being received as members.

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

C. Removal from membership:

1. A church which no longer meets the requirements for membership in the Association (4.A.1 above) may be removed by a two-thirds vote of the existing member churches at a meeting of the Association.

2. A proposal for the removal of a church from membership in the Association must include reasons for exclusion and should be presented to the member churches at least thirty days prior to a meeting of the Association.

3. Such action should only be undertaken after the Moderator and member churches have diligently sought to resolve the issues.

4. A church subject to removal may circulate a rebuttal among member churches.

D. Inactive membership: churches that are not represented in the Annual Association Meeting by delegates or by letter for three consecutive years may be administratively moved to inactive (i.e., non-voting) status by agreement of the Executive Committee (Moderator, Moderator pro tem, and Secretary). A church that continues to show disinterest in the Association may be removed from membership (4.C above).

E. Individual memberships:

1. Individuals from non-member churches may join as associate members. Requirements shall be similar to those for churches given above.
2. Individual members are welcome to participate at the Association meetings but may not vote on Association business.
3. Individual members may withdraw from the Association or be removed in a manner similar to member churches.

Article 5: National Structure of the Association

A. Meetings:

1. There shall be at least one Annual Meeting of the Association.
2. Each member church may send two men (usually elders or deacons) as voting representatives at the Association meetings. Churches sending only one delegate will only have one vote. Forty percent of active member churches must be represented to constitute a quorum at any Association business meeting. Member-churches outside the United States may vote but shall not be counted in the determination of a quorum.
3. In addition, member churches may send as many non-voting attendees to Association meetings as they wish.
4. Business to be conducted shall include matters such as:
 - a. Receiving new member churches.
 - b. Removing member churches.
 - c. Appointing a Moderator.
 - d. Amending the standards of the Association.
 - e. Addressing doctrinal issues.
 - f. Hearing missionary reports (or other appeals for help in ministry projects).
5. The Annual Meeting shall also include times of instruction and prayer to teach and encourage the representatives attending.

6. Open and closed meetings.
 - a. Ordinarily, Association meetings will be open to all who wish to attend (such as fraternal delegates, observers, etc.).
 - b. The Association may go into closed session (restricted to voting representatives only) upon a majority vote of the delegates of member churches present.
7. Other Association meetings may be called for a particular purpose by agreement of at least one-half of the member churches.
 - a. All member churches must be informed at least one month in advance.
 - b. A majority of member churches must be represented to constitute a quorum before any business can be conducted.

B. The Moderator

1. The representatives present at the Annual Meeting shall elect a Moderator from among themselves to serve for a two-year term. No man may serve as Moderator for two consecutive terms.
2. The Moderator shall be responsible to:
 - a. Make arrangements for the Annual Meeting (including location).
 - b. Preside over the sessions of the Annual Meeting.
 - c. Encourage and maintain communication among the member churches (using the internet, e-mail, postal service and other means of communications).
 - d. Call for special meetings of the Association when at least one-half of the member churches agree (see 5.A.7 above).
3. The Moderator may be removed by a majority vote of the representatives. In that case, the Moderator *pro tem* will fill his term.

C. The Moderator *pro tem*.

1. The representatives present at the Annual Meeting shall elect a Moderator *pro tem* from among themselves to serve for a two-year term.

2. The Moderator *pro tem* will be responsible to:
 - a. Maintain and publish a membership list.
 - b. Assist the Moderator in his functions.
 - c. Serve in cases of the Moderator's absence, or to fill out the term of the Moderator if the position of Moderator becomes vacant.
3. The Moderator *pro tem* may be removed by a majority vote of the representatives.

D. The Secretary

1. The representatives present at the Annual Meeting shall elect a Secretary from among themselves to serve for a two-year term.
2. The Secretary will be responsible to:
 - a. Keep and distribute records (including minutes) of Association business.
 - b. Assist the Moderator and the Moderator *pro tem* in their functions.
3. The Secretary may be removed by a majority vote of the representatives.

E. Other board members may be elected to serve with and assist the officers on the executive board.

Article 6: Regional Associations

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

Article 7: Functions of the Association

A. Limitations:

1. The Association may not have any employees or funds.
2. The Association itself may not sponsor any projects or ministries (such as missionaries). Each project or ministry must be under the oversight and authority of a particular local church.

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

4. Member churches may not be restricted from joining other associations or from having fellowship with or participating in projects with churches outside the Association.

B. Member churches may facilitate prayer for one another by circulating prayer letters to other member churches and by regularly praying for one another in our church meetings.

C. The Association will facilitate the cooperation of local churches in ministry projects.

1. Every project will be under the supervision of one local church.
2. Member churches may seek the participation of other churches at the Annual Meeting or by letter, internet, or other means of communication.
3. Participation by other churches may be in the form of money, people, materials or other resources, and prayer.
4. Participation by any local church shall be strictly voluntary, and may be withdrawn with appropriate notice.
5. Examples of projects might be:
 - a. Sending out a full time missionary.
 - b. Short-term missions projects.
 - c. Church planting.
 - d. Forming or teaching in a pastoral training institute.
 - e. Publishing and distributing literature such as books, pamphlets, tapes or using the internet.
 - f. Ministering to the needs of the poor.
 - g. Participating in advisory councils for ordinations of church officers.

D. The Association will facilitate the participation of local churches in joint meetings and conferences.

1. Churches in an area may hold periodic joint services.
2. Family camps and conferences.
3. Elders/pastors meetings and conferences.
4. One church would sponsor any given meeting and invite others to join.

E. The Association may facilitate the efforts of local churches in offering mutual assistance and sharing of resources, such as:

1. Exchanging pulpits.
2. Lending personnel to meet particular needs (e.g., internships, special classes).
3. Sharing material resources (e.g., extra chairs and supplies).
4. Developing curricula.

F. The Association may assist member churches when difficulties or differences threaten the peace, unity and edification of one church or of the churches in general (Acts 15:1-35; Proverbs 15:22; see also *1689 London Baptist Confession* 26.15). A member church must request such assistance, and the conclusions of a mediator or church council may not be imposed upon the churches or their officers.

1. Member churches may request help from the Association in resolving such disputes as may occur:
 - a. Between member churches (e.g., a complaint about unscriptural teaching or practice).
 - b. Among the officers of member churches.
 - c. Between church members and their leaders (after every effort has first been made to resolve the issue within the local church).
2. The process shall be as follows:
 - a. One party in the dispute shall request assistance from the Moderator in writing (if the Moderator is himself a party in the dispute, the request should be directed to the Moderator *pro tem*).

b. The Moderator shall make arrangements for a meeting of the affected parties and agreed upon representatives from other member churches. The representatives shall organize themselves as a council in an appropriate manner to hear testimony and shall seek to effect reconciliation consistent with truth among all parties.

c. The Association is able to give counsel on the matters in dispute through its chosen representatives and to publish its findings to all the churches concerned (Acts 15:23ff.), but the representatives have no jurisdiction over the churches themselves or their officers.