

# *New Hope Reformed Church*

*Pastor Russ Westbrook*

*Meeting Place: 4192 N. Wilderness Rd. Mount Vernon, KY 40456*

## *Congregational Constitution*

### PREAMBLE - DECLARATION AND COVENANT

Berea, Kentucky, April 6, 2011

We, whose names are hereunto subscribed, perceiving ourselves to be called by God to be together a Church of the gospel; having a humble sense of our unworthiness of so great a mercy and with a humble reliance on the aids of Divine Grace, now thankfully and boldly lay hold on His Covenant.

We profess our firm belief in the Christian Doctrine taught by the Holy Scriptures and embraced by the faithful people of God in the world, and resolve by Divine help to conform ourselves to the proper obedience of the gospel as long as we live.

We surrender ourselves to the One True God, who is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and we publically proclaim Him this day to be our God, our Father, our Savior, our Sanctifier and Leader, and we receive Him as our portion forever.

We surrender ourselves to the blessed Jesus who is the One True Divine and human mediator for the people of God, and adhere to Him as the head of His people in the Covenant of Grace, relying upon Him as our Prophet, Priest and King, to bring us to eternal blessedness.

We desire with dependence on His promised and powerful grace, to walk together as a church of our Lord Jesus Christ in the faith and order of the gospel, so far as the same shall be revealed to us; conscientiously attending to the public worship of God; the sacraments of His New Testament; the discipline of His Kingdom according to the Platform of Unity affixed to the Savoy Declaration of 1658, along with all His holy institutions; living in communion with one another, watchfully avoiding all sinful stumbling-blocks and contentions as becomes a people whom God has bound up together in a common life. And we present our offspring along with ourselves unto the Lord.

All this we do, flying to the blood of the everlasting covenant for the pardon of our many errors, and praying that the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great Shepherd of the sheep, would prepare and strengthen us in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well pleasing to Him; to whom be glory forever. Amen.

Signed by:

## ARTICLE I - CHURCH

Section 1 - Name - This church shall be called New Hope Reformed Church, hereafter referred to as “this church”.

Section 2 - Purpose - The purpose of this church shall be to glorify God through the ministry of reconciliation as set forth in 2 Corinthians 5:11-21, by spreading, teaching and defending the historic orthodox faith of which we are inheritors. (Matthew 28:16-20) (I Timothy 3:15)

This church shall seek to minister to the flock through the preached word; through reverent, biblical, liturgical, and holy worship to God; through the administration of the sacraments; through Christian education for all ages; and through fellowship whereby love, friendship, seasonal encouragement, compassion, and admonition may be given and received. All these things shall be done so that the various gifts of the flock may be discovered and developed to the end that the body of Christ may be built up and that it may reach unity and maturity in the faith. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

We believe that the Reformed faith to which we hold is the most accurate and consistent interpretation of Scripture. This, coupled with the historic position of the congregational churches for appealing to all types and conditions of men, makes us especially responsible to provide outreach to all and to seek to minister to their physical and spiritual needs. By this we reflect our Lord's compassion and seek to bring them into the visible church. This is to be performed both by the individual Christian who is part of this church in whatever circumstances and surroundings in which he finds himself, and also through corporate support of missions, both foreign and domestic, so that we may fulfill our corporate and individual responsibility as members of Christ's Universal Church, that is His body, of which He is the head forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-15; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1: 15-20)

## ARTICLE II - DOCTRINE

Section 1 - This church has for a foundation of Christian faith, upon which its work shall be based and to which its public teaching shall be conformed, the Holy Bible, consisting of the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments. We believe that it is inspired of God and is totally inerrant, infallible, and authoritative in its original manuscripts. We further accept and believe the system of doctrine taught by the Apostles', Nicene, and Athanasian Creeds, the Savoy Declaration with its attached Platform of Unity, and the Heidelberg Catechism, these being the secondary statements and standards of faith of this church.

Amendment made January 2017 by congregational vote: article 16 of the Savoy Declaration of Faith was amended to allow ruling elders as well as teaching elders to administer the seals. As amended the article reads:

A church furnished with officers (according to the mind of Christ) hath full power to administer all his ordinances; and where there is want of anyone or more officers

required, that officer, or those which are in the church, may administer all the ordinances proper to their particular duty and offices; but where there are no teaching or ruling officers, none may administer the seals, nor can the church authorize any so to do.

## Section 2 – Further Statements of Faith

WE BELIEVE the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as verbally inspired by God and inerrant in the original text, are fully accurate in all subjects they address. We therefore believe in a Divine creation of all things visible and invisible, from nothing and at the command of God alone, and shaped in six literal 24-hour days, some 4000 years before the true and historical Advent of Jesus Christ in Galilee.

WE BELIEVE that Adam, the first man, was created in the image of God; that he sinned, and thereby incurred physical and spiritual death, which is separation from God; and that all men are born with a sinful nature as being descended from him.

WE BELIEVE in the supernatural, as an actual and real part of reality.

WE BELIEVE the scriptures teach covenant baptism; therefore this church shall teach and practice such baptism in accord with both scripture and its secondary standards. However, out of compassion for weak consciences in error on this matter, those who withhold their children from this sacred ordinance until later years will not be brought before the Visible and Voting Church for discipline; though they shall be nevertheless admonished to better and truer belief by the officers of the church.

WE BELIEVE that the normative practice of regular weekly communion is assumed in scripture. We therefore shall practice weekly communion, barring any providential hindrance. (1 Corinthians 4:1).

WE BELIEVE that the Signs and Seals of the Covenant of Grace belong to all those who are a part of Christ's Church. Therefore the Table of the Lord shall be extended to all baptized persons who are members in good standing of churches which match the description given in Article Three, Section Two. The decision whether to commune or not shall be left up to each individual's conscience, or their parents if of younger years, unless they are under some form of church discipline which would preclude such.

WE BELIEVE that the Scriptures reserve the governance of both the church and the family to males in submission to the King, Jesus Christ. Therefore the offices of both pastor and elder are reserved to men alone, who meet the other qualifications of such office as delineated in Scripture.

WE BELIEVE that homosexuality is a sin, and is subject to rebuke and church discipline, just as is any other sin.

WE BELIEVE that marriage is a Divinely created institution, to be a life-long covenant between one man, and one woman.

### ARTICLE III – GOVERNMENT

Section 1 - This church seeks to conform its faith to the Scriptures and to base its polity on the principles of apostolic practice as presented in the Holy Bible.

Section 2 - The Head and King of the Church (both Universal and local) is the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore this church recognizes all churches which can give truthful assent to the straightforward teachings of the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.

Section 3 - This church claims the right to direct its own affairs without being subject to the authority or control of any other ecclesiastical organization. It also holds and will conform to the principle of the fellowship of churches, by seeking and giving sympathy, counsel, and aid in its fraternal relations with other orthodox churches, especially those of the Reformed tradition.

Section 4 - The authority and responsibility to govern this church rests solely with the congregation under the supreme authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Congregational authority must be exercised prudently within the context of the constitution and by-laws of this church, so long as each conforms to Holy Scripture as determined by the congregation. Authority (though not ultimate responsibility) to conduct specified affairs may be delegated to the church officers.

Section 5 - The government of this church shall be divided into two branches to be known as the Visible Church and the Entire Church.

The Visible and Voting Church consists of all who are baptized and have made a credible profession of public faith and have reached 18 years of age (or are under 18 years, but have entered into a faithfully initiated Christian marriage), and are therefore Visible and Voting members of this church.

The Entire Church consists of all baptized members of this church.

The powers of the Visible and Voting Church shall be subordinate to the will of the Visible and Voting Church. Specifically, the Visible and Voting Church shall concern itself with the financial and real estate business of this church.

The affairs of the Entire Church shall be administered by a board of Pastor(s) and Elders, but this board shall have no authority other than that delegated to it by the Visible and Voting Church.

Section 6 - All the decisions of this Visible and Voting Church pertaining to the government and affairs of this church, made in accordance with this constitution and by-laws, are binding on all members of this church.

The Visible and Voting Church shall meet at least annually- with at least a simple majority present- to conduct the business of the church. Such meetings shall be conducted in accordance with Roberts Rules of Order.

#### ARTICLE IV - MEMBERSHIP

##### Section 1 - Composition

The membership of this church is composed of those baptized believers, and their baptized children who have associated themselves in this church, for the maintenance of the Means of Grace, the promotion of personal holiness, and the extension of the Redeemer's Kingdom.

##### Section 2 - Categories

The categories of membership in this church are:

Baptized

Visible

Visible and Voting

Baptized members are baptized children and adults who have not yet made a credible profession of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, and are children of a member of this church.

Visible members are those who have been baptized, have made a credible profession of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, possess a basic understanding of the doctrine and government of this church, and have given an informed affirmation of their desire to join in the fellowship of this church.

Visible and Voting members are those who have been baptized, who have made a credible profession of faith in Christ as Lord and savior, possess a basic understanding of the doctrine and government of this church, have given an informed affirmation of their desire to join in the fellowship of this church, and have attained the age of 18 years (or are under 18 years, but have entered into a faithfully initiated Christian marriage) .

All members of this church, being equal in the sight of God, are to share equally in the privileges and responsibilities of membership according to the structure of this church and their individual abilities.

### Section 3 - Censures

The whole Visible and Voting church is given the keys to the Kingdom of Christ, to open wide the church to covenant people, and to lock its gates to hardened and unrepentant sinners. It is therefore incumbent upon it that it uphold the honor of Christ, and censure those among its members who live in beliefs or practices that are contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the Confessional Documents of this church. While the officers of this church are called to rebuke and exhort, censures shall be enacted by the whole Visible and Voting church meeting in a congregational meeting, and may include being excluded from the Sacraments and other Means of Grace, such as church attendance, performance of office, Etc. up to and through the removal of membership in the Visible and Voting Church, or Officer status. All censures require a simple majority vote, except the removal of Officers, which require a three-fourths vote.

Censures of the church are spiritual; however, the Visible and Voting church can bar anyone from attendance at church functions and free right to the use of church property, as seems good and honoring to Christ to it.

The Visible and Voting church can censure those who have committed acts against the teaching of the Holy Scripture and the Confessional Documents of this church, even if those being censured remove themselves from membership.

Censures worked by the Visible and Voting church can only be removed by the Visible and Voting Church.

The purpose of a censure by the Visible and Voting church shall always be to protect the teaching and honor of Christ and the Holy Scriptures, and shall always be performed with a goal to see the one censured brought to repentance and restoration.

### ARTICLE V - OFFICERS

Section 1 - The ordained officers of this church shall be pastor or pastors, elders, and deacons. The Visible and Voting Church may elect other officers as it sees fit to serve at the direction of the congregation and under the supervision of the elders and appropriate officers. The election of any officer, as well as the removal of any officer from his office, requires a three-fourths vote of the Visible and Voting Church.

All officers shall be Visible and Voting members of this congregation.

Officers who derive some or all of their livelihood from their service to this church, shall be given a contract and statement of call from the Visible and Voting Church, delineating the duties expected of their office, and the compensation to be extended to them. This contract will include a promised severance package of at least three months continued compensation, should the officer be asked to demit his office, or it be voted such by the Visible and Voting Church.

Section 2 - The Pastors - The pastor of this church shall be a man who:

Is called by the congregation

Accepts the call of the congregation

Is ordained and installed by the congregation in accordance with the Savoy Declaration and its attached Platform of Unity.

The pastor, a teaching elder, while equal in authority with the ruling elders, is called to a position as first among equals, due to his conspicuous position before this church and the community.

The pastor must be willing and able to serve God's flock as a shepherd; spiritually feeding them, leading them, and guarding them.

The pastor shall be responsible for overseeing the spiritual life, the regular services, and the meetings of this church; preaching the Word of God and administering the sacraments.

Section 3 - The Elders - Elders shall be men recognized by the congregation as godly and mature (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and willing to humbly serve this church (Matthew 20:25-28) as shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4); and are elected, ordained, and installed by the congregation.

The elders are to live among God's people as models of his grace in the lives of sinners. They are to lead and teach, exhort and rebuke, comfort and encourage the flock, all with the tender love of Christ.

The board of pastor(s) and elders (also known as the Church Session) shall take spiritual oversight of this church by:

Administration, guarding the flock (Acts 20:28) and the pulpit, shepherding, teaching, disciplining the flock (Matthew 18:15-27 and 1 Corinthians 5; Hebrews 12:17), administering the sacraments, and encouraging each other.

The Church Session shall administer the policies and programs approved by the congregation.

Section 4 - The Deacons - Deacons shall be men recognized by the congregation as godly (1 Timothy 3:8-13) and full of wisdom and of the Spirit (Acts 6:3): elected, ordained, and installed by the congregation.

The deacons, overseen by the pastor(s) and elders, shall be responsible for the material ministry of this church, including its real property, fiscal matters, and the material aspects of its outreach and service.

## ARTICLE VI – AMENDMENTS

Concerning amending this constitution, proposed amendments may be made by members of the congregation, as individuals or as the Session.

Any proposed amendment must be provided in writing to visible members in advance of the first congregational meeting at which the amendment is to be discussed. The proposed amendment shall be sent in writing by mail or email to visible members not less than five days prior to the first meeting. At the first duly-called congregational meeting, the proposed amendment must be discussed and changes may be made thereto, but the proposed amendment shall not be brought to a vote.

At the same meeting, a date and time for a second congregational meeting shall be set. That second meeting must follow the first meeting by not less than seven days but not more than fourteen days unless there is a providential hindrance. Changes made to the proposed amendment during the first congregational meeting shall likewise be put in writing and sent by mail or email to visible members no less than five days prior to the second congregational meeting. At that second duly-called congregational meeting, the proposed amendment may be discussed and must be brought to a vote.

Meetings considering amendments to this constitution must be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order.

Amendments must pass by a two-thirds majority vote of the quorum present.

Amendments that are passed shall be immediately in effect even though not published.

Amendments that do not pass cannot be brought before the congregation until after one calendar year from the date the proposed amendment was defeated.