

# **Trinity Fellowship**



**Churches**

# **Book of Church Order**

**Eighth Edition, May 2024**

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1 **1 Foundational Commitments**

2 Trinity Fellowship Churches (hereafter, TFC) is an ecclesiastical union of confessional,  
3 connectional, and missional churches committed to maturing and multiplying disciples with  
4 the gospel of Jesus Christ for the glory of God.

5 **1.1 Confessional**

6 In TFC, we are united by our common Confession of Faith—one that is Reformed,  
7 Christocentric, Continuationist, Complementarian, and Baptist. Such beliefs  
8 summarize for us what the Bible teaches and, as such, are the definition of “sound  
9 doctrine” and what our elders affirm, teach, and defend.<sup>1</sup>

10 1.1.1 Our Confession of Faith is Reformed.

11 Being Reformed, we uphold a doctrine of Scripture, God, Man, Christ, and  
12 Salvation consistent with the magisterial Reformers as summarized in their  
13 teaching and writing. As a testimony to this, our confession took as its starting  
14 point the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith (Second London Confession of  
15 Faith). This was then changed at various points to be more fully in line with  
16 our understandings (e.g., “Of the Church,” “Of Marriage,” “Of Man,” and “Of  
17 the Empowering Spirit” were added). Yet, the Reformed heart of the 1689  
18 Confession remains intact.

19 1.1.2 Our Confession of Faith is Christocentric.

20 Being Christocentric, we see Christ as central to God's plan of redemption, the  
21 Bible, our churches, our message, and our lives. Thus, we “preach Jesus Christ  
22 and him crucified,”<sup>2</sup> lift up the name of Jesus as the only path of salvation,<sup>3</sup>  
23 recognize that the Old Testament bears witness to him in all of its writings, see  
24 a right understanding of Jesus Christ as essential to interpreting the Old and  
25 New Testaments,<sup>4</sup> and delight in him as the very centerpiece of God's “good  
26 news,” the gospel that offers salvation freely to all who believe in the Lord  
27 Jesus Christ. To be a Christian is to be in the deepest way possible “in Christ,”<sup>5</sup>  
28 and to be a member of the Church is to be a living member of “the body of  
29 Christ.”<sup>6</sup>

30 1.1.3 Our Confession of Faith is Continuationist.

31 Being Continuationist, we affirm that we now live “in the last days” defined by  
32 the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on “all flesh.”<sup>7</sup> Along with all Reformed  
33 Christians, we affirm the necessity of the Spirit's work in regeneration and

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<sup>1</sup> Tit 1:9.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 2:2.

<sup>3</sup> Acts 4:12.

<sup>4</sup> John 5:39; Luke 24:27.

<sup>5</sup> Eph 2:6–13.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:17–21.

34 sanctification. Yet, as Continuationists, we also believe all the New Testament  
35 gifts<sup>8</sup> are available throughout the Church age. Further, these are not just to be  
36 believed in but earnestly desired for the building up of the people of God.<sup>9</sup>  
37 Such gifts are manifestations of God's power for the revelation of his glory and  
38 the great blessing of his Church - and draw the lost into the kingdom of God.  
39 Being both Christocentric and Continuationist, we seek to be *robustly*  
40 *trinitarian*.

41 1.1.4 Our Confession of Faith is Complementarian.

42 Being Complementarian, we affirm only two genders in God's created order  
43 for humanity, male and female; both made "in the image of God."<sup>10</sup> These two  
44 genders possess differing but complementary roles in the family and in the  
45 church. In the family, the husband is the head and is called to sacrificially love  
46 and honor his wife.<sup>11</sup> The wife is the suitable helper and is called to love and  
47 submit to him.<sup>12</sup> The two are called to energetically support each other.<sup>13</sup> In the  
48 church, elders are to be male,<sup>14</sup> and Scripture says a woman is not "to teach or  
49 to exercise authority over a man."<sup>15</sup> On deacons and gender, see BCO-2.5.  
50 Gender roles are never to be used as a basis for affirming any kind of  
51 superiority or inferiority but are to be a picture of a unity-in-diversity and  
52 diversity-in-unity that glorifies our Creator and becomes a vivid display of the  
53 Church and her Savior.<sup>16</sup>

54 1.1.5 Our Confession of Faith is Baptist.

55 Being Baptist, we affirm that all those —and only those— who "believe in  
56 the Lord Jesus Christ" should be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the  
57 Son and of the Holy Spirit" by immersion in water.<sup>17</sup> Baptism is not required  
58 for salvation but is a sacrament required for obedience.

59 **1.2 Connectional**

60 We believe it is healthy, strategic, and safe for a church to be interdependent and not  
61 disconnected from other congregations. We are, therefore, a fellowship of  
62 interconnected churches united in the Holy Spirit and committed to building  
63 relationships, developing healthy elderships and churches, adhering to our  
64 foundational documents, and pursuing mission.

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<sup>8</sup> Allowing that the NT gift lists are not exhaustive.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Cor 12:7–11; 14:1.

<sup>10</sup> Gen 1:27.

<sup>11</sup> Eph 5:21–33; 1 Pet 3:1–7; Tit 2:2–6.

<sup>12</sup> Eph 5:21–33; 1 Pet 3:1–7; Tit 2:2–6; Gen 2:18.

<sup>13</sup> Gen 2:24–25; Eccl 4:9–10.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Tim 3:1–7.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Tim 2:12.

<sup>16</sup> Eph 5:21–33.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 16:31; Matt 28:19–20; cp. 8:36; 19:4–5.

65 1.2.1 Connected through the Holy Spirit  
66 The Bible affirms that all Christians are part of the singular “body of Christ”  
67 with Christ as its head.<sup>18</sup> There might be “many parts” in this body, but there is  
68 only one body.<sup>19</sup> Our ecclesiastical union is, therefore, an application and  
69 expression of our deeper and enduring spiritual union.

70 1.2.2 Connected through Relationship  
71 This ecclesiastical and organizational union is to be mirrored in committed and  
72 God-honoring relationships consistent with what it means to be a part of the  
73 household of God.<sup>20</sup> We want sincerely and affectionately to regard one  
74 another as brothers and sisters in Christ and fellow workers and fellow soldiers  
75 and even be ministers to one another's needs.<sup>21</sup> As we live out our Christian  
76 lives, we desire to bear one another's burdens, build one another up, and stir up  
77 one another to love and good works.<sup>22</sup>

78 1.2.3 Connected through Developing Healthy Elderships and Churches  
79 Through conferences, Cohorts, and various other contexts, we are committed  
80 to creating healthy elderships of equipped, qualified, encouraged, and  
81 empowered men. We also seek to extend this cooperation, life, growth, and  
82 protection to the churches themselves (see BCO-6 for much more on  
83 “Fruitfulness” derived from our connectedness).

84 1.2.4 Connected through Our Foundational Documents  
85 To undergird our ecclesiastical union, we subscribe to a common Confession  
86 of Faith, *Book of Church Order*, and TFC Partnership Agreement. These  
87 documents bring critical definition to what we believe, do, and are committed  
88 to as member churches of TFC.

89 1.2.5 Connected through Mission  
90 Though each church is committed to mission in its own context, we also seek  
91 ways to connect with other churches within TFC for church planting, frontier  
92 missions, and strengthening the evangelistic culture and initiatives of each  
93 member church.

### 94 **1.3 Missional**

95 In TFC, we are committed to joining God in developing missional disciples and  
96 planting and building missional churches.

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<sup>18</sup> Eph 1:22–23.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Cor 12:20.

<sup>20</sup> Eph 2:19.

<sup>21</sup> Phil 2:25.

<sup>22</sup> Gal 6:2; 1 Thess 5:11; Heb 10:24.

- 97           1.3.1   Missional God  
98                    Our mission is a dim reflection of the *Missio Dei*, “the mission of God.” God's  
99                    mission is demonstrated in the Father sending the Son, and the Father and Son  
100                   sending the Spirit.<sup>23</sup> In the same way, our triune God sends out the Church in  
101                   mission.<sup>24</sup>
- 102           1.3.2   Missional Disciples  
103                   The Church plays a vital role in the fulfillment of the plan of God to reconcile  
104                   all things together in Christ. Therefore, elders must seek to equip church  
105                   members as disciples who engage Christ's reign in all of their varied  
106                   stewardships and vocations.<sup>25</sup> Such disciples proclaim the gospel, live fruitful  
107                   lives of good works in all of life, make disciples, and serve the poor.<sup>26</sup>
- 108           1.3.3   Missional Churches  
109                   In TFC, we seek to make disciples of all the nations by planting and building  
110                   churches that plant and build churches in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>  
111                   Further, we seek to identify, equip, and send out church planters; and come  
112                   alongside like-minded frontier missions efforts.

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<sup>23</sup> John 20:21; 15:26.

<sup>24</sup> John 20:21; Matt 28:18–20.

<sup>25</sup> Eph 4:11–13.

<sup>26</sup> Col 1:20, 28; Matt 5:16; Gal 6:10; Luke 10:25–37; Matt 28:18–20.

<sup>27</sup> Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8.

113 **2 Church Polity**

114 **2.1 Christ's Authority**

115 Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and on earth.<sup>28</sup> He is the head of the Church  
116 and, as such, presides over the entire Church.<sup>29</sup> Apart from him, a church has no power  
117 and no authority to act on his behalf, for Christ as head of the Church is the holder of  
118 all power and authority.<sup>30</sup> Only Christ's authority is without limits. All human  
119 authority is delegated by God and limited according to the God-given spheres of  
120 authority.<sup>31</sup> Church authority is an important God-given sphere of authority with  
121 significant and eternal implications.

122 **2.2 The Nature and Context of Church Authority**

123 Jesus gave his disciples authority to bind and loose on earth in the name of heaven.<sup>32</sup>  
124 The contexts of these verses teach us this binding and loosing is an authoritative  
125 determination of who is and who is not considered part of God's people. Furthermore,  
126 we can see in the contexts that this binding and loosing is performed through the  
127 proper proclamation and stewardship of the gospel and through properly overseeing  
128 the membership of a local church. Church membership is a key identifier of a genuine  
129 believer. At its core, church authority has the power only to oversee and administrate  
130 church membership. The church does this through proclaiming the gospel so people  
131 might hear, believe, be baptized, admitted to the church, and built up in Christ. It also  
132 does this through other important biblical functions of the church, including  
133 administering baptism and communion, conducting proper worship, and practicing  
134 proper discipline over church membership. Thus, church authority is exercised in the  
135 realm of church membership (i.e., its sphere of responsibility is those who are  
136 Christians).

137 **2.3 Membership**

138 Each church is a defined gathering of local believers who profess biblical faith in  
139 Christ and demonstrate this faith in the preaching of and genuine obedience to his  
140 word and in the administration of the sacraments.<sup>33</sup> They are gathered together by  
141 mutual agreement to serve as a local body of believers committed to stewarding the  
142 gospel, obeying the Scriptures, and advancing the mission of the church to make  
143 disciples of all peoples.

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<sup>28</sup> Matt 28:18; Col 2:10; 1 Pet 3:22 et al.

<sup>29</sup> Eph 1:22; 4:15; Col 1:18 et al.

<sup>30</sup> Col 1:18; 2 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14.

<sup>31</sup> John 19:11; Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet 2:13.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 16:17-19; 18:15-20.

<sup>33</sup> "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists" (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.9).

144 They are to follow the biblical order of the local church by having elders to govern  
145 them and utilizing deacons in leading appropriate ministries of the local church.<sup>34</sup> The  
146 church, as elders, deacons, and members, operates with true Christian unity, love, and  
147 discipline according to good biblical order. Elders exercise their authority given by  
148 Christ with the appropriate participation of the congregation. Numerous biblical texts  
149 indicate the congregation has an essential part to play alongside the elders'  
150 leadership.<sup>35</sup>

151 TFC allows a degree of latitude in how churches practice congregational participation  
152 in decision-making. In some churches, elders seek to include the congregation in key  
153 decision-making through informal relational means, typical of a healthy relationship  
154 between a flock and its pastors. Other churches may choose to employ official votes of  
155 affirmation for key decisions such as church discipline, the ordination of an elder, the  
156 installation of a deacon, the endorsement of a yearly budget, and the approval of by-  
157 law changes. TFC allows this latitude but also requires member churches to ensure  
158 that local practices and by-laws do not conflict with the mandates of this BCO.

## 159 **2.4 Elders**<sup>36</sup>

160 Elders are authorized by and accountable to Christ to oversee, shepherd, and govern  
161 God's people as gathered in their local churches. They exercise ecclesiastical authority  
162 according to numerous biblical texts.<sup>37</sup>

163 Elders, overseers, and pastors are synonymous in the New Testament.<sup>38</sup> These three  
164 descriptions speak of one office that exemplifies Christian maturity, oversees the life  
165 and mission of the church, and cares for and directs the local church according to the  
166 word of God. The norm for elders is to serve as part of a plurality, not as a sole elder.<sup>39</sup>

167 Elders are commissioned to exercise authority in specific ways. First, they are to teach  
168 God's word faithfully and with full authority as those appointed by God to proclaim  
169 his word to the local church and its mission field so the lost might be saved, the saints  
170 equipped and matured, and God glorified and worshipped.<sup>40</sup>

171 Second, they are to oversee God's people and ensure their safety and success by  
172 guiding God's people into biblical truth and wisdom, leading them in proper biblical  
173 worship, overseeing the administration of the sacraments, resisting false doctrine and

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<sup>34</sup> Phil 1:1 et al.

<sup>35</sup> Acts 6:3; 1 Cor 5:4-5; 6:1-2; 2 Cor 8:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 5:19, 1 John 2:26-27. Also note how most of the epistles are addressed to entire churches and thus the whole church, including the elders who govern, has a collective responsibility for fidelity and fruitfulness.

<sup>36</sup> We understand our polity either as local church presbyterianism or elder-rule congregationalism. Either way, we all agree that the exercise of church authority is in the hands of local elderships.

<sup>37</sup> Matt 18:16,18; Acts 20:28; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4-5; 5:17; 2 Tim 4:1-5; Tit 2:15; Heb 13:17; Jam 3:1; 1 Pet 5:2.

<sup>38</sup> Tit 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Pet 5:1, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 11:30; 14:23; 20:17; 1 Tim 4:14; Tit 1:5

<sup>40</sup> John 21:15; Eph 4:11-16, 1 Tim 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17; 4:1-5; Tit 1:9; 2:15.



174 false leaders, and equipping and deploying God's people to jointly build up the body  
175 of Christ and perform its proper functions.<sup>41</sup>

176 Third, they are to lead the whole church in the discipline of church members both in  
177 their admission and their dismissal. This is done in conjunction with the whole church  
178 and for the care and protection of the church, to rescue the sinner, to preserve the  
179 reputation of the church, and to glorify God.<sup>42</sup>

180 Finally, elders are uniquely responsible before God for the life and mission of the local  
181 church.<sup>43</sup> As such, church members are called to support them and submit to their  
182 leadership as circumscribed by the Word of God.

## 183 **2.5 Deacons**

184 Deacons are specialized ministers of a local church designated for service in particular  
185 tasks of ministry.<sup>44</sup> Their office requires the same type of Christian character as that  
186 described for an elder but does not require the ability to teach or lead like an elder.<sup>45</sup>  
187 Deacons do not hold the authority of an elder but nevertheless can possess significant  
188 responsibility in the life and mission of a local church. They organize and execute key  
189 ministries of a church. TFC allows for churches to hold different convictions about  
190 whether women can be designated as deacons. Notwithstanding, we do so committed  
191 to the biblical principles related to male and female roles being appropriately  
192 expressed in this office.<sup>46</sup>

## 193 **2.6 Discipline**

194 Every church is called to exercise biblical church discipline.<sup>47</sup> Each member church of  
195 TFC will have a clear policy of church discipline and commit to practice it faithfully.  
196 This will include maintaining a clear membership roll that is available to every church  
197 member. Each member church of TFC will have a clear policy of addressing charges  
198 against elders according to BCO-8 and passages such as 1 Tim 5:19-21.

199 TFC agrees to allow appropriate appeals of church discipline and charges against  
200 elders. The judgments rendered in such appeals will be duly honored as an official  
201 ruling of TFC. An appropriate response to any judgment shall be a condition of  
202 continued partnership. These appeals will follow the procedures outlined in the Rules  
203 of Discipline. The Rules of Discipline are subject to the approval of the General  
204 Assembly.

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<sup>41</sup> Acts 20:28; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:4-5; Tit 1:7; 1 Pet 5:2.

<sup>42</sup> Matt 18:16,18; 16:18-19; John 20:23; 1 Cor 4:14-5:13; 2 Cor. 13:1-4.

<sup>43</sup> 1 Cor 3:12-15; Heb 13:17; Jam 3:1.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Acts 6:1-7.

<sup>45</sup> 1 Tim 1:8-13.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., 1 Tim 2:12; 3:1-13; Eph 5:21-33.

<sup>47</sup> Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5.

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## 2.7 Denominational Leaders

In order for our local churches to thrive and remain faithful, these churches delegate certain authority to certain TFC elders to fill denominational roles and structures within TFC. This stewardship gives those elders in denominational roles and structures the right to do certain things within our denomination, such as to adjudicate charges against elders, to censure elderships as needed, to coordinate mission, to approve ordinations, and certain other functions articulated in the BCO. Such elders in denominational roles and structures do not hold any church authority apart from that properly assigned to them from local church elders.<sup>48</sup>

We understand that God uses gifted men to serve in various functions beyond the local church for the greater good of the Church and her mission.<sup>49</sup> Some in TFC would understand such functions to be apostolic or even the functions of a modern-day “small-a” apostle.<sup>50</sup> Others would understand such functions as simply necessary for the health and mission of the overall Church and thus most naturally fulfilled by those with the appropriate gifts. We believe that the various committees and their chairmen within TFC are appropriate places for those so gifted and elected within TFC. We also expect that there will be multiple opportunities for such men to serve within TFC that do not require a formal role yet still are under proper biblical authority. All TFC roles, formal or informal, are under the authority of the elders of TFC, serve at their behest, and function as stewards of the charge given them by the TFC elders.

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<sup>48</sup> This is written from the perspective of ordered churches. Cases of disorder, e.g. churches without elders or an undefined membership, can affect how authority is exercised.

<sup>49</sup> “Church” here stands for the broader visible Church beyond a singular local church, while, “church” stands for a local church.

<sup>50</sup> For the nomenclature of “‘small-a’ apostle” see Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 905–911.

225 **3 Partnership**

226 **3.1 Scriptural Bases**

227 All Christians are members of the body of Christ, united with him and, therefore,  
228 united to one another.<sup>51</sup> The New Testament is rich with examples of local churches  
229 operating interdependently. They are planted by teams and individuals from other  
230 churches.<sup>52</sup> They contribute to the needs of other churches.<sup>53</sup> They maintain a  
231 connection with missionaries planting churches on the mission field.<sup>54</sup> They form city-  
232 wide elderships.<sup>55</sup> They come together to decide how to respond to doctrinal crises.<sup>56</sup>  
233 They share common practices that are normative.<sup>57</sup> They are subject to the same  
234 apostolic leadership.<sup>58</sup>

235 **3.2 The Nature and Extent of Our Partnership**

236 We conclude from this that local churches operating in their God-given authority  
237 should voluntarily associate with each other for the purpose of forming deep  
238 partnerships that will best help them promote their mutual fidelity and fruitfulness.

239 We believe that the highest authority in the church today is that of local elders. We  
240 believe that denominational leadership is meant to serve local churches as a  
241 stewardship of the responsibilities and authority given to them by local churches and  
242 their elders. Any partnerships formed must not override the clear biblical authority or  
243 function of the local church and its elders. It must not create an additional category of  
244 authority above that of elders.

245 Therefore, commitment to denominational associations and partnerships must remain  
246 a voluntary act of elderships. But this does not mean such partnerships are trivial.  
247 Local churches can choose to cooperate at very deep levels to best ensure their  
248 respective and collective fidelity and fruitfulness in light of the truths of Scripture.  
249 Such cooperation can involve the oversight and care of denominational leadership and  
250 the employment of the God-given gifts of such leaders. No actions or decisions shall  
251 be made by any office, staff, or committee apart from the explicit authorization of the  
252 elders as documented in the BCO, the Confession of Faith, and official decisions  
253 appropriately ratified by the General Assembly (see BCO 4.3).

254 We understand our partnership as the sharing of leadership and the authority of elders  
255 for the advancement of our mutual fidelity and fruitfulness. We have purposefully  
256 ordered our partnership to explicitly feature shared leadership and authority versus  
257 sequestered leadership and authority. We expect all our various forms and all of our

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<sup>51</sup> 1 Cor 12:12–20.

<sup>52</sup> Acts 8:4-8; 11:19-21; 13:1-3.

<sup>53</sup> 2 Cor 8-9.

<sup>54</sup> Acts 14:27; 18:22.

<sup>55</sup> Acts 15:3; 20:17; Tit 1:5.

<sup>56</sup> Acts 15.

<sup>57</sup> Acts 11:16.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Cor 4:21; 12:28; Eph 2:20.

258 elders to reflect this approach to governance in TFC. Although the various forms of  
259 our partnership are given appropriate responsibilities and correspondent authority, we  
260 fully expect each part to intentionally seek maximum cooperation with all the relevant  
261 other parts of our denomination. Any cohort, assembly, committee, chairman,  
262 eldership, or elder who consistently tries to ignore this commitment and accumulate  
263 power or responsibility beyond the explicit mandates given in this BCO shall be  
264 subject to the censure of the TFC General Assembly and any appropriate disciplinary  
265 measures. It is our hope that we will always value and promote the benefit of elders  
266 who walk in unity and shared leadership for the glory of God and the good of our  
267 denomination.

### 268 **3.3 Voting In Our Partnership**

269 All denominational elections shall be by nomination and popular election by local  
270 church elders. Only individuals actively serving as local elders in a TFC church may  
271 vote in a Regional Assembly or in the General Assembly. A quorum consists of at  
272 least half of the voting members of the respective electing body. A quorum must be  
273 present for all binding votes. Representatives who are unable to travel shall be allowed  
274 to participate and vote via teleconference. When multiple seats are being filled, this  
275 popular vote shall require a minimum of 25% of the respective electing body  
276 (Quorum). When one office is being filled, the threshold shall be a simple majority.  
277 Runoffs may be necessary. All popular votes in this BCO require this same approach.  
278 All terms shall commence at the beginning of the next calendar year unless indicated  
279 otherwise. If there are more than a majority of committee members who have the same  
280 term lengths, they must cast lots to stagger their terms by plus or minus one year so  
281 that no more than half of them will expire simultaneously. With all of the above  
282 convictions in mind, the following sections describe the nature, scope, forms, and  
283 function of our partnership.

### 284 **3.4 Membership in Our Partnership**

285 Although a church may be any gathering of professing believers submitted to Christ  
286 and pledged to walk together according to his word, such a church may not be able to  
287 actively participate in healthy partnership with other churches for diverse reasons. A  
288 church in partnership should have the means and the officers needed to fully involve  
289 themselves in being connectional, confessional, and missional with other churches.  
290 Therefore, TFC limits partnership to churches that shall have at least ten adult  
291 members committed to supporting the church financially and with their time and  
292 energy, led by at least one ordained elder certified by TFC. Such members should be  
293 capable of significantly contributing to the life and mission of the church. All the  
294 benefits and responsibilities of partnership with TFC may apply for such a church.

295 **4 Forms of Our Partnership**

296 **4.1 Cohorts**

297 The basic building block for TFC is a Cohort. Typically, Cohorts are 2-10 churches  
298 that agree to cooperate together for mutual fidelity and fruitfulness. They can be  
299 formed along geographic, cultural, or relational lines.

300 Every member church of TFC shall join a Cohort unless prevented by extenuating  
301 circumstances. Churches may form Cohorts across regions. Cohorts meet as frequently  
302 as mutually helpful, with a recommended minimum of a quarterly meeting of  
303 representative elders, preferably in person, from each Cohort church.

304 Every year, the Cohort shall elect one of its elders to serve as Chairman. Any two  
305 Cohort elders can nominate an elder to fill this role. The Chairman is elected by a  
306 popular vote. He may serve multiple terms. The Chairman will help to facilitate the  
307 function of the Cohort through communication, organization, and example. The  
308 Cohort churches should consider how to best support the Chairman in his efforts,  
309 including financial compensation.

310 The local Cohorts are less formal than Regional and General Assemblies and thus  
311 need no formal approval. The Cohort chairman shall register his Cohort with the  
312 respective Region(s). If there are any significant issues that cannot be resolved in the  
313 Cohort, the Cohort shall refer the matter to the Region representing the majority of the  
314 Cohort members. In the case where there is no regional majority, the Cohort shall refer  
315 the matter to the Chairman's Region. The Regional Assembly has the responsibility to  
316 oversee the health and effectiveness of its cohorts both individually and as a whole.  
317 The RA can disband a Cohort by majority vote for sufficient reasons. Sufficient  
318 reasons include a Cohort becoming divisive, cliquish, exclusive, and no longer  
319 fulfilling the mandate of the Cohorts. If a Cohort is cross-regional, any of the RAs  
320 connected to it can (by majority vote) disband the Cohort.

321 The Cohort's prime goals are:

- 322 1. To build strong relationships among elders and church members in the Cohort.
- 323 2. To encourage, care for, and mentor fellow elders and elder candidates for optimal  
324 pastoral health.
- 325 3. To cooperate in church life and mission in a substantial way that best serves the  
326 Cohort churches.

327 **4.2 Regional Assemblies**

328 **4.2.1 Overview**

329 Regional Assemblies are made up of the elderships from 5-100 churches in a  
330 given cultural or geographic context. The Regional Assembly is where the  
331 more formal functions outlined in this section are accomplished, such as  
332 Church Planting and Partnership decisions, Ordination Certifications, Regional  
333 Adjudications, and financial decisions. The more relational aspects of our

334 partnership shall be the responsibility of the Cohorts rather than the Regional  
335 Assemblies. Churches in the Region should consider giving up to 4% of their  
336 general funds towards church planting and other efforts of the Region.

337 4.2.2 Regional Assembly Meetings

338 The RA shall meet at least once per year and when called by at least 25% of  
339 the representatives. It shall choose a location that is most convenient for the  
340 representatives. Elders who are unable to travel shall be allowed to participate  
341 and vote via teleconference.

342 4.2.3 Forming Regions

343 Regions shall be formed at the request of any five GA members who want their  
344 churches to form a new region. The formation of the new Region requires a  
345 simple majority vote of the GA.

346 4.2.4 Regional Chairman

347 The RA shall elect one of their elders to serve as Chairman. The Regional  
348 Chairman is to provide leadership to the Region as a steward of the  
349 responsibilities and authority given to him by the RA and its elders. Any three  
350 RA elders can nominate an elder to fill this role. Nominations shall be  
351 submitted to the RA 30 days before the election. The Chairman is elected by  
352 popular vote. He shall serve a three-year term. He shall serve no more than two  
353 consecutive terms. The Chairman will help to facilitate the function of the RA  
354 through communication, organization, and example. His primary  
355 responsibilities are to organize the RA meetings and to ensure the healthy  
356 function of RA Committees in accordance with the BCO. If possible, the  
357 Region should choose by popular vote a moderator distinct from the Chairman  
358 to facilitate the meetings. The Chairman may moderate RA gatherings. The  
359 Moderator shall use the rules chosen by the popular vote of the RA. The RA  
360 churches should consider how to best support the Chairman in his efforts,  
361 including financial compensation, as needed.

362 4.2.5 Regional Committees

363 As needed, the RA shall elect the necessary committee members. Committees  
364 shall have a minimum of three members. The Judicial Review Committee shall  
365 have a minimum of five members. These members shall be nominated by any  
366 three RA elders and elected by a popular vote (see BCO-3.3). Nominations  
367 need to be submitted to the RA 30 days before the election. The committee  
368 members are elected by a popular vote. They shall serve a three-year term.  
369 They may serve multiple terms.

370 4.2.5.1 Regional Committees Chairmen

371 Each committee shall have a chairman who will serve to facilitate  
372 discussion, cooperation, and the accomplishment of the committee's goals.  
373 Each chairman must be an elder of TFC. Each committee chairman shall be

374 nominated by any member of his respective committee and elected by  
375 popular vote of the members of his committee. Each committee chairman  
376 may serve up to three years before requiring re-election. No chairman may  
377 serve more than two consecutive terms.

378 4.2.5.2 Regional Planting and Partnership Committee

379 Regional Assemblies shall elect a Regional Planting and Partnership  
380 Committee that is qualified to process and oversee all church plants and new  
381 church partnerships in their Region per Recommendations and Requirements  
382 for Church Plants and Partnerships. Churches that are added to TFC will do  
383 so by following the processes in these Recommendations and Requirements,  
384 signing all required partnership agreement documents (BCO 7), and being  
385 appropriately reviewed and received by a 2/3 majority vote of a quorum of  
386 the respective RA. The Recommendations and Requirements for Church  
387 Plants and Partnerships are subject to the approval of the GA.

388 4.2.5.3 Ordination Certification Committee

389 Regional Assemblies shall elect an Ordination Certification Committee that  
390 is qualified to process and oversee all ordinations in their Region per  
391 Recommendations and Requirements for Ordination Certification. The  
392 Recommendations and Requirements for Ordination Certification are subject  
393 to the approval of the GA.

394 4.2.5.4 Judicial Review Committee

395 Regional Assemblies shall elect a qualified Judicial Review Committee that  
396 is trained and equipped to process any and all adjudications and appeals  
397 brought from local churches in their Region per the Rules of Discipline. The  
398 Rules of Discipline are subject to the approval of the GA.

399 4.2.5.5 Regional Finance Committee

400 Regional Assemblies shall elect a qualified Regional Finance Committee  
401 that is trained and equipped in church finance to organize and present a  
402 yearly budget in their Region per the Recommendations and Requirements  
403 for Finance Committees. The Recommendations and Requirements for  
404 Finance Committees are subject to the approval of the GA.

405 **4.3 General Assembly (GA)**

406 The General Assembly of Elders is comprised of one representative elder from each  
407 TFC church. Each representative must be currently ordained and actively serving as an  
408 elder of his church. It gathers to oversee our association. It meets annually and when  
409 called by at least 25% of the representatives. It shall choose a location that is most  
410 convenient for the representatives. Representatives who are unable to travel shall be  
411 allowed to participate and vote via teleconference. It shall have the following  
412 responsibilities:

- 413 4.3.1 Formation of Committees  
414 The GA shall form and oversee any committee (see BCO-4.4) they deem  
415 necessary for the successful function of this association. Such committees will  
416 serve at the will of the GA and report to the GA at least annually. Nominations  
417 for committee members must be submitted at least 30 days before the meeting  
418 of the GA. Committee members will be elected by the popular vote of the GA  
419 (see BCO-3.2).
- 420 4.3.2 Confession of Faith  
421 The GA shall oversee the Confession of Faith and any proposed changes to the  
422 Confession of Faith. Any changes to the Confession of Faith must be brought  
423 by a GA Committee or any five GA representatives. Proposed changes to the  
424 Confession of Faith should be submitted to the Theology Committee and  
425 Oversight Committee for feedback at least 150 days before the meeting of the  
426 GA. Finally, proposed changes must be submitted at least 120 days before the  
427 meeting of the GA and can only be ratified by a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority of the GA.
- 428 4.3.3 Book of Church Order  
429 The GA shall oversee the BCO. Any changes to the BCO must be brought by  
430 any GA committee or any three GA representatives. Proposed changes to the  
431 BCO should be submitted to the Polity Committee and Oversight Committee  
432 for feedback at least 120 days before the meeting of the GA. Finally, proposed  
433 changes must be submitted at least 90 days before the meeting of the GA and  
434 can only be ratified by a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority of the GA.
- 435 4.3.4 General Assembly Chairman
- 436 4.3.4.1 The GA shall elect a Chairman annually from their own number. The  
437 Chairman must be an objective moderator without conflicts of interest in his  
438 role. He shall not be a voting member of the Oversight Committee nor paid  
439 staff for TFC.
- 440 4.3.4.2 The Chairman shall be nominated by at least three GA members and elected  
441 by a popular vote (see BCO-3.2). Nominations for the GA Chairman must be  
442 submitted at least 30 days before the meeting of the GA and will be elected  
443 by the popular vote of the GA (see BCO-3.2).
- 444 4.3.4.3 The Chairman will moderate the following meeting of the GA using *Robert's*  
445 *Rules of Order* or an alternative set of rules approved by  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the GA.
- 446 4.3.4.4 The Chairman will serve as the point of contact for establishing the agenda  
447 for the annual meeting and any special meetings of the GA.
- 448 4.3.4.5 Any three representatives may initiate a request for a special meeting  
449 through the Chairman. The Chairman shall present the request from the  
450 representatives verbatim to poll the GA in order to ascertain whether there is



451                   25% or more of the GA interested in a special meeting. The poll results shall  
452                   be made available to all GA representatives.

453           4.3.5   Motions and Reports

454                   The GA shall vote on any motions or reports brought by any committee or any  
455                   three representatives. All motions and reports must be received by the GA  
456                   representatives 30 days prior to meeting. Decisions on these motions and  
457                   report responses will require a simple majority vote.

458           4.3.6   Contributions

459                   The GA shall receive and manage contributions through the use of appropriate  
460                   committees to promote the health and growth of TFC. All member churches  
461                   are asked to give 2% of their annual general fund to this central fund, 4% of  
462                   their church's general fund to regional functions, and another 4% of their  
463                   general fund to mission work of their choice, including regional and TFC-wide  
464                   efforts in church planting and the global mission work of TFC.

465           4.3.7   Recommendations and Requirements

466                   The GA shall approve all and any guidelines for any function of TFC. No  
467                   funds will be spent, nor any binding actions imposed apart from established  
468                   guidelines, budgets, and requirements explicitly approved by the GA.  
469                   Recommendations and Requirements shall require a 2/3 majority vote by the  
470                   GA.

471           **4.4   Committees of the General Assembly<sup>59</sup>**

472           4.4.1   Overview of GA Committees

473                   Committees shall consist of elders of TFC especially qualified for the duties of  
474                   the respective committee. Committees may also contain exceptionally qualified  
475                   advisory members from the churches of TFC who serve in an unofficial  
476                   advisory capacity. Committees are tasked by the GA for specified purposes.  
477                   Committees are to provide leadership to address specific goals as stewards of  
478                   the responsibilities and authority given to them by the GA and its elders. They  
479                   serve at the will of the GA and should orient themselves to best inform and  
480                   equip the GA for making key decisions for TFC.

481           4.4.2   Appointments and Terms

482                   Committee members shall be nominated by any three GA members and elected  
483                   by popular vote (see BCO-3.2). All nominations for committee members must  
484                   be received by the GA representatives 30 days prior to meeting. The number of  
485                   committee members should be an odd number from a minimum of three up to  
486                   whatever size is most conducive to their task. By a simple majority vote of the

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<sup>59</sup> Note that the PCA and the SBC use a similar organizational structure and appear to be very faithful and fruitful in carrying out their goals. See <https://www.pcaac.org/what-we-do/> and <https://vimeo.com/224574483>, respectively.

487 committee, they may invite and include advisory members to participate in  
488 their meetings and/or work, however, advisory members are not voting  
489 members and may not be empaneled in any adjudicatory proceedings. There  
490 may be no more than 50% as many advisory members as voting members in  
491 any committee. Whenever the voting body of a committee changes for any  
492 reason, a new affirmation vote must be taken prior to the inclusion of any  
493 advisory members in further committee activities. Any member in good  
494 standing in a TFC church is eligible to be an advisory member of a GA or RA  
495 committee. Any other individual must be affirmed by a majority vote of the  
496 respective governing body prior to inclusion as an advisory member of a  
497 committee. Notwithstanding the limitations on the number of advisory  
498 members, committees are free to invite consultants to bring advice to the  
499 committee on a short-term basis. Temporary committee members may be  
500 appointed should a committee member not be able to complete their term.  
501 Temporary committee members shall serve up to a one-year term, subject to  
502 re-election. Permanent committee members shall serve a three-year term.

#### 503 4.4.3 Committee Chairmen

504 Each committee shall have a chairman who will serve to facilitate discussion,  
505 cooperation, and the accomplishment of the committee's goals. Each Chairman  
506 must be an elder of TFC. Each committee chairman, except for the Oversight  
507 Committee, shall be nominated by any member of his respective committee  
508 and elected by popular vote of the members of his committee. Each GA  
509 Committee chairman may serve up to three years before requiring re-election.  
510 No chairman may serve more than two consecutive terms.

#### 511 4.4.4 Chairman of the Oversight Committee

512 The Chairman of the Oversight Committee shall be nominated by any three  
513 GA members. Nominations shall be submitted to GA members at least 30 days  
514 before meeting. The Chairman shall be elected by popular vote to a three-year  
515 term. He shall serve no more than two consecutive terms. The Chairman will  
516 facilitate and coordinate the Oversight Committee's activities and serve as the  
517 President of TFC. As President, he serves as an important representative,  
518 communicator, and guardian of the foundational commitments, Book of  
519 Church Order, and Confession of Faith of Trinity Fellowship Churches, on  
520 behalf of the TFC General Assembly and its committees, and under their  
521 respective authority. He seeks to support and enhance the function of every  
522 element of TFC as a servant leader and spokesperson, under the authority of  
523 the elders of TFC as specified in the BCO. Accordingly, he will supply an  
524 annual review with recommendations to the General Assembly, on the  
525 faithfulness and fruitfulness of Trinity Fellowship Churches to their stated  
526 commitments, values, and practices found in the BCO, CoF, and related  
527 documents and practices.

528 4.4.5 Committee Reports

529 Committee members shall issue a report at least annually. Such reports should  
530 be presented to best inform and equip the GA to make the needed decisions.  
531 With this in mind, and if applicable, committee reports shall include majority  
532 and minority opinions on the issue in question—even if the minority is only  
533 one member of the whole committee. This will best serve the GA's decision-  
534 making. Committee Reports must be submitted to the GA at least 30 days prior  
535 to the meeting.

536 4.4.6 Permanent Committees

537 The following committees are permanent committees: Church Development  
538 Committee (CDC), Central Finance Committee (CFC), General Assembly  
539 Planting & Partnership Committee (GAPPC), Global Missions Committee  
540 (GMC), Oversight Committee (OC), Polity Committee (PC) and Theology  
541 Committee (TC).

542 Each of these permanent committees shall have members elected to a term of  
543 three years. The number of the respective committee members shall be 5 for  
544 the Church Development Committee (CDC), 3 for the Central Finance  
545 Committee (CFC), 3 for the Planting & Partnership Committee (PPC), no more  
546 than 5 for the Global Missions Committee (GMC), 5 for the Oversight  
547 Committee (OC), 3 for the Polity Committee (PC) and 5 for the Theology  
548 Committee (TC). Committee members shall all serve the GA in its decision-  
549 making authority. They may recommend budgets to be overseen by the  
550 Finance Committee and presented to the GA, and they may requisition and  
551 oversee staff as needed. Staff should be members of a TFC church. If they are  
552 not members, the respective committee shall present a yearly review and  
553 recommendation on the staff member to the General Assembly of TFC for a  
554 vote of continuing service.

555 4.4.6.1 Church Development Committee

556 The Church Development Committee shall work to establish  
557 Recommendations and Requirements related to pastoral ministry and church  
558 life. They shall work in cooperation with the relevant committees of the GA  
559 to develop and disseminate any resources helpful for pastoral and church  
560 development, life, and mission. They shall organize and present appropriate  
561 conferences and seminars to best serve TFC with input from the Theology  
562 Committee, the Oversight Committee, and any other relevant committee.  
563 Their strategic plan for conferences and seminars must be approved by the  
564 GA before implementation. This plan shall be submitted as a report with  
565 appropriate motions to the GA. The Church Development Committee shall  
566 steward relevant curricula, conferences, seminars, and material related to  
567 church and elder care while relying on the expertise, jurisdiction, and scope  
568 of the respective committees, contexts, elderships, and elders of TFC and  
569 any other appropriate resource.

570 4.4.6.2 Finance Committee  
571 The Finance Committee shall coordinate with all other committees and staff  
572 and all motions involving financial expenditure. They shall receive proposals  
573 and work with the various parties to present a unified budget to the GA for  
574 their approval. The Finance Committee's proposed budget shall be  
575 introduced as a committee report to be received, amended, and approved at  
576 the GA annual meeting.

577 4.4.6.3 General Assembly Planting & Partnership Committee  
578 The General Assembly Planting & Partnership Committee shall oversee  
579 Recommendations and Requirements for the Planting and Partnership  
580 Committees in the Regions. The committee shall also develop and provide  
581 the necessary resources to support healthy and vigorous church planting and  
582 new partnerships among the regions and beyond in TFC.

583 4.4.6.4 Global Missions Committee  
584 The Global Missions Committee shall oversee Recommendations and  
585 Requirements for the Global Missions work. This is a critical aspect of our  
586 mission. Its role is to provide clarity for our elders and churches. The target  
587 for this committee is the unreached peoples of the earth,<sup>60</sup> while the  
588 Planting & Partnership Committees will be concerned about church plants in  
589 areas being reached throughout the globe. They will research existing  
590 opportunities to help our local churches better steward the limited resources  
591 they have.

592 4.4.6.5 Oversight Committee  
593 The Oversight Committee shall work with all the various committees to  
594 assist the GA Chairman in establishing an orderly agenda for the GA annual  
595 meeting. They shall present their reasoned input in response to all committee  
596 reports. They shall ensure corporate ethical, legal, and financial compliance  
597 for TFC and serve as the organizational board for non-profit law purposes.  
598 They shall steward the BCO and by-laws. The President and the Oversight  
599 Committee shall communicate for TFC by representing established values,  
600 documents, policies, and past, present, and planned activities. The committee  
601 may requisition and oversee staff to help accomplish their goals. Any  
602 executive staff of the Oversight Committee must be hired with a job  
603 description and financial compensation endorsed by the General Assembly.  
604 Further Recommendations and Requirements for the Oversight Committee  
605 shall be ratified by the GA.

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<sup>60</sup> Unreached peoples are historically defined as those ethnic groups with less than 2% who are evangelical Christians. See Zane Pratt, "Here's What We Mean by Unreached Peoples and Places," <https://www.imb.org/2016/11/22/what-do-we-mean-by-unreached-peoples-and-places/>

606 4.4.6.6 Polity Committee

607 The Polity Committee shall oversee amendments to the Book of Church  
608 Order and offer their expert advice to the GA and its committees on any  
609 matter pertaining to the Book of Church Order. When a particular decision is  
610 required on the proper interpretation and application of the Book of Church  
611 Order, the Polity Committee shall make a ruling that shall stand until the  
612 next GA meeting. At the next GA meeting, the GA must vote on whether to  
613 uphold or override the ruling. This shall be done by a simple majority vote.  
614 The ruling must be submitted as a Polity Committee report to the GA. The  
615 Polity Committee will also develop Recommendations and Requirements for  
616 itself as needed. These must be ratified by the GA.

617 4.4.6.7 Theology Committee

618 The Theology Committee shall work to establish Recommendations and  
619 Requirements for Ordination Certification, including introducing any needed  
620 amendments or commentary. They shall also help steward the Trinity  
621 Confession of Faith by receiving and interacting over amendments,  
622 questions, or comments from TFC eldership, by proposing recommended  
623 amendments for the General Assembly, and by engaging and reporting to the  
624 GA on key theological issues related to the Confession of Faith.  
625 Additionally, the Theology Committee shall make recommendations to other  
626 committees related to key theological issues pertinent to TFC. The Theology  
627 Committee will also develop Recommendations and Requirements for itself  
628 as needed.

629 4.4.7 Forming New Committees

630 Any motions within the GA to form a committee shall specify the scope and  
631 goals of the committee. Any funding needed for the work of the committee  
632 shall be first approved by the GA.

633 4.4.8 Removal of Committee Members

634 Each committee will define its duties and conduct per the Recommendations  
635 and Requirements for Committees and Assemblies stewarded by the Polity  
636 Committee. Committee members may be removed by their respective  
637 committee if a 2/3 majority of the committee votes and agrees that the  
638 committee member has either been intentionally disruptive, consistently  
639 uncooperative, or persistently negligent in duty. He shall be removed  
640 immediately upon such a vote. Such removals may be appealed to the Court of  
641 Appeals by any member of the committee. The Court of Appeals must hear the  
642 respective case and render a decision based on the BCO, this paragraph  
643 included. Care must be taken both to consider the view of the majority of the  
644 committee but also to protect the committee member and TFC from unjust  
645 politicking or partisanship. It is better to err by retaining a difficult committee  
646 member than to harm the health that can come through including diverse  
647 perspectives on a committee.

648 **5 Fidelity of Our Partnership**

649 **5.1 Confession of Faith**

650 We help ensure biblical fidelity in our churches by mutually agreeing to a common  
651 and historic Confession of Faith. It is our “common” confession in that it is the  
652 personal confession of faith for every elder in TFC. Failure to subscribe to this  
653 confession with duly noted additions and exceptions is grounds for the removal of  
654 ordination certification from TFC. It is a “historic” confession in that it is largely  
655 derived from the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith but with modifications made to it.

656 Any elder with exceptions to our Confession of Faith must be certified by the  
657 Regional Ordination Certification Committee according to our established Ordination  
658 Recommendations and Requirements.

659 **5.2 Ordination Recommendations and Requirements**

660 We help ensure fidelity by creating agreed-upon Ordination Recommendations and  
661 Requirements that allow us to certify an elder's ordination. Elders are gifts from the  
662 ascended Jesus to local churches.<sup>61</sup> As such, it is the responsibility of local churches to  
663 recognize and steward the development of elder candidates. This includes all relevant  
664 training and experience followed by a methodical and clear ordination process.  
665 Ordination to the office of Elder is a local church function that is certified by TFC. All  
666 TFC elders will be certified for ordination by Ordination Recommendations and  
667 Requirements established by the GA of elders and their respective committees. These  
668 Ordination Recommendations and Requirements will be approved by a 2/3 majority  
669 vote of the GA and will become binding for all TFC ordination certifications.

670 **5.3 Church Discipline**

671 Church discipline is an essential practice of the New Testament church that protects  
672 the purity of the church,<sup>62</sup> the witness of the church to the world,<sup>63</sup> and the salvation of  
673 genuine Christians.<sup>64</sup> Although a difficult function to perform, it is necessary for the  
674 good of the church, her mission, and the fame of Christ.

675 Each member church of TFC must have a clear and accessible policy of church  
676 discipline for all church members. They must also maintain an accurate membership  
677 roll that is available to every church member. Each church shall ensure members are  
678 aware of this policy and trained in its proper use.

679 Each member church of TFC must have a clear and accessible policy of addressing  
680 charges against elders according to 1 Tim 5:19–21 and commit to practice it faithfully.  
681 Each church shall ensure members are aware of this policy and trained in its proper  
682 use.

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<sup>61</sup> Eph 4:7–12.

<sup>62</sup> 1 Cor 5:6–8.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Cor 5:1.

<sup>64</sup> 1 Cor 5:5.

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683 TFC agrees to allow appropriate appeals of church discipline and elder charges. The  
684 judgments rendered in such appeals will be duly honored as an official ruling of TFC.  
685 An appropriate response to any judgment shall be a condition of continued  
686 partnership. These appeals will follow the procedures outlined in the Rules of  
687 Discipline in this Book of Church Order.

688 **6 Fruitfulness of Our Partnership**

689 **6.1 Church Health**

690 6.1.1 Cooperation

691 Churches in TFC are strongly encouraged to partner together in the various  
692 training, care, and mission activities they offer. This should include first  
693 notifying other churches in their Cohort and Region of any seminars, courses,  
694 conferences, or retreats that they are offering that might be helpful to another  
695 church to attend. Secondly, it should include sharing all curricula and lessons  
696 learned that will help other churches and church ministries. This partnership  
697 will thrive in proportion to the concrete efforts made to share resources and to  
698 minister together as churches. Each Cohort and Region is encouraged to create  
699 a robust communication system to promote such cooperation.

700 6.1.2 Mediation Assistance

701 The Regional Judicial Committees, with help from any relevant GA  
702 committees, should train select individuals in personal and church mediation.  
703 Additionally, the regions may choose to consult with and employ Christian  
704 ministries with the expertise in mediation to both train their elders as well as  
705 provide needed mediation. Mediation is almost always a better choice for any  
706 church conflicts before adjudication is pursued and is a prerequisite for most  
707 disciplinary proceedings in TFC.

708 6.1.3 Abuse and Reporting Recommendations and Requirements in TFC

709 6.1.3.1 TFC Churches in the US

710 6.1.3.2 TFC Churches Outside the US

711 The policies in BCO-6.1.3.1 apply outside the US as much as is  
712 possible and applicable. It is understood that certain international  
713 situations will make specific aspects of this policy untenable.

714 6.1.4 Best Practices

715 Regions and the relevant committees of the GA should create and maintain  
716 guidelines containing documented best practices for church health. These  
717 should include not only best practices for pastoral work but also best practices  
718 for diaconal ministries and any and all ministries that should be a regular part  
719 of the life and mission of churches in TFC.

720 **6.2 Pastoral Health**

721 6.2.1 Relationships

722 TFC will thrive according to the depth of relationships among its pastors and  
723 church members. While formal organization and agreement are necessary, they  
724 serve as a structure around which to build meaningful and Lord willing,



725 lifelong relationships for the sake of Christ and his Church. Therefore, we urge  
726 all TFC elders to make it their personal goal to build strong relationships  
727 around this fellowship of churches. These relationships should be strongest  
728 among Cohorts and regions but should also exist across the entire  
729 denomination and the various geographical and cultural contexts within our  
730 fellowship.

731 6.2.2 Training & Mentoring

732 We value the training and mentoring of elders. We recognize that this training  
733 begins in the early stages of a man's Christian life. We expect that the many  
734 shared resources we have as churches will be helpful in these earlier stages of  
735 elder development. We encourage each Region to develop shared curricula,  
736 resources, and best practices for the development of future and present elders  
737 in cooperation with any relevant committees of the GA.

738 6.2.3 Best Practices

739 TFC advances the ministry of elders largely through establishing and sharing  
740 guidelines for best practices. These are not binding in any way but nevertheless  
741 are extensive in the help they offer for the multiple situations and seasons  
742 elders in TFC will face.

743 6.2.3.1 Repositioning or Removal of an Elder for Non-Disciplinary Reasons

744 Circumstances may arise such that an elder chooses to resign from  
745 office willingly for non-disciplinary reasons (i.e., not due to serious  
746 sin or other disciplinary reasons). Additionally, there may be various  
747 situations wherein an eldership decides to either reposition an elder to  
748 a different role within their eldership or to remove him from the  
749 eldership for various reasons of team fit, competence, gifting, or even  
750 due to budgetary or scheduling realities. Not all resignation, removal,  
751 or repositioning of an elder is considered disciplinary in nature, nor  
752 do all situations involving the resignation, removal, or repositioning  
753 of an elder involve character disqualification. All eldership  
754 disciplinary situations are covered in BCO-8 and the RRDA. In non-  
755 disciplinary cases, elderships should consult the Church Development  
756 Committee and the relevant Recommendations and Requirements  
757 they generate on the topic. Any resignation, removal, or repositioning  
758 should ensure the elder is well cared for in the process and has  
759 recourse to appeal to the JRC should he believe he has been treated  
760 unjustly. Any elder who resigns or is removed for non-disciplinary  
761 reasons who remains qualified as an elder and a member in good  
762 standing may retain his ordination certification from TFC for at least  
763 one year but no more than three years. Only individuals actively

764 serving as local elders in a TFC church may vote in a Regional  
765 Assembly or in the General Assembly.

766 6.2.4 Accountability

767 There is a significant amount of help offered by the various forms and  
768 commitments formalized in TFC. However, the ongoing relational  
769 accountability of TFC may do more to ensure fidelity and fruitfulness than all  
770 these formal structures. We, therefore, encourage all TFC elders to form vital  
771 relationships among themselves that include regular confession, prayer, and  
772 care for each other in the various temptations and struggles that come with  
773 following Christ and pastoring while opposed by the world, the flesh, and the  
774 devil. The Cohorts are an excellent context for this sort of ongoing  
775 accountability.

776 **6.3 Evangelism**

777 6.3.1 Resources

778 Cohorts and Regions, as well as the relevant committees of the GA, should  
779 develop resources and Recommendations and Requirements of best practices  
780 that will help establish a thorough and ongoing culture and practice of  
781 evangelism and outreach within TFC. Our trinitarian God's mission and gospel  
782 compel us to be churches and Christians known for proclaiming and living by  
783 the good news of Jesus Christ. This is lived out as we develop and share  
784 various resources such as training, methodologies, and materials to advance  
785 evangelism.

786 6.3.2 Cooperation

787 Cohorts, Regions, and fellow churches within TFC should regularly and  
788 extensively cooperate in evangelism efforts. This should include exchanging  
789 teams and individuals dedicated to evangelistic and outreach efforts. This  
790 should include using gifted and trained evangelists to develop and lead efforts  
791 among churches in a Region or Cohort or beyond. This should include  
792 donating financial gifts to efforts among the churches.

793 **6.4 Church Planting**

794 6.4.1 Resources

795 The Regional Planting and Partnership Committee, in cooperation with the GA  
796 Planting and Partnership Committee, shall develop and disseminate the  
797 resources needed for healthy and vigorous church planting in the regions.

798 6.4.2 Cooperation

799 Cohorts, regions, and the entirety of TFC should partner together to advance  
800 church planting. This should include but not be limited to sponsoring  
801 internships, sending church planters to other churches, funding the training and

802 development of church planters, donating to new church plants, and sending  
803 members of the church to be a part of a church plant.

804 6.4.3 Processes

805 The GA Planting and Partnership Committee shall develop and disseminate  
806 Recommendations and Requirements for church planting. These shall provide  
807 extensive detail for carrying out our church planting mission together. These  
808 shall include detailed processes for church planting and how the particular  
809 aspects can be funded and supervised in partnership with regions and Cohorts.

810 A plurality of elders is the norm for churches in the New Testament. But for  
811 the sake of advancing the mission with the expectation of soon establishing a  
812 plurality of elders, once a church plant is established and incorporated with at  
813 least one elder, it may apply for full status as a member church of TFC.

814 **6.5 New Church Partnerships**

815 6.5.1 Resources

816 The Regional Planting and Partnership Committee, in cooperation with the GA  
817 Planting and Partnership Committee, shall develop and disseminate the  
818 resources needed for healthy and vigorous new church partnerships in the  
819 regions.

820 6.5.2 Cooperation

821 Cohorts, regions, and the entirety of TFC should partner together to advance  
822 new church partnerships. This should include but not be limited to reaching out  
823 to candidate churches and elders, including them in the various activities of our  
824 association, guiding them through the new partnership process, inviting them  
825 to the various pastoral gatherings among Cohorts, regions, and the GA, and  
826 providing funds for the candidate church to participate in various TFC  
827 activities.

828 6.5.3 Processes

829 The GA Planting and Partnership Committee shall develop and disseminate  
830 Recommendations and Requirements for new church partnerships. These shall  
831 include detailed processes for new church partnerships and how the particular  
832 aspects can be funded and supervised in partnership with regions and Cohorts.

833 Once a candidate church and its elders have satisfactorily gone through the  
834 prescribed process, it may apply for full status as a member church of TFC.

835 **6.6 Global Missions**

836 6.6.1 Background

837 TFC exists to help fulfill the Great Commission's call to make disciples of all  
838 nations. We recognize that we do so alongside a long line of faithful and  
839 fruitful churches, missionaries, and agencies laboring throughout the world

840 over many years. Therefore, we do not seek to operate independently or  
841 originally in our efforts. We seek to cooperate with any and all churches,  
842 missionaries, and agencies that will mutually benefit our efforts to fulfill the  
843 Great Commission. We prioritize efforts aimed at planting viable indigenous-  
844 led churches among the least-reached peoples of the world with the hope they  
845 will become part of TFC or a like-minded association of churches.<sup>65</sup>

846 6.6.2 Activities

847 Member churches should set apart a good portion of their regular budget to  
848 support global missions among the least-reached peoples of the world. Elders  
849 should encourage a culture among their churches of generous giving to this  
850 cause. Each Region should be active together in supporting strategic projects  
851 and efforts towards advancing global missions. This might include sponsoring  
852 and supporting sister churches in areas in close cultural or geographic  
853 proximity to target locales and cultures. The Global Missions Committee shall  
854 establish Recommendations and Requirements and funding avenues for work  
855 in global missions.

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<sup>65</sup> Unreached peoples are historically defined as those ethnic groups with less than 2% who are evangelical Christians. See Zane Pratt, “Here’s What We Mean by Unreached Peoples and Places,” <https://www.imb.org/2016/11/22/what-do-we-mean-by-unreached-peoples-and-places/>

856 **7 Trinity Fellowship Churches Commitments**

857 **7.1 Partnership Agreement**

858 I sincerely receive and affirm that what is written in the Trinity Confession of Faith as  
859 a whole and in its parts is taught in Holy Scripture, either directly or by implication  
860 (with any approved exceptions). I further promise that if at any time I remain out of  
861 accord with this Confession of Faith, I will, on my own initiative, communicate these  
862 changes first to my fellow elders in my local church and, as necessary, the fellow  
863 elders in Trinity Fellowship Churches

864 I, along with the eldership of my local church, sincerely approve of the form of  
865 government and discipline of TFC, contained in this BCO, as a wise and helpful  
866 application of biblical polity. I promise to support it as far as I am able and will only  
867 resign from this partnership for matters of conscience or persistent and serious  
868 incompatibility. I promise to honor any pertinent Recommendations and Requirements  
869 that have been ratified by the General Assembly.

870 I, along with the eldership of my local church, will strive towards contributing 2% of  
871 our church's general fund income toward the support of TFC-wide functions, another  
872 4% of our church's general fund to regional functions, and another 4% of our general  
873 fund to mission work of our choice, beyond our local church, including regional and  
874 TFC-wide efforts in church planting and the global mission work of TFC.

875 I understand that this Agreement does not confer on any party hereto the legal right to  
876 or any interest in such executing party's property, personal property, intellectual  
877 property, employees, or responsibility or liability for such party's debts, claims, or  
878 liabilities. Entering into this Agreement is entirely voluntary, which means that  
879 nothing herein is intended to prevent any TFC member church from leaving according  
880 to the procedures given herein.

881 I, \_\_\_\_\_, do sincerely receive and subscribe to the above  
882 obligation as a just and true exhibition of my faith and principles and do resolve and  
883 promise to exercise my ministry in conformity therewith.

884 *Signed:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

885 *Church:* \_\_\_\_\_

886 **7.2 Terminating a Partnership**

887 7.2.1 Principle

888 We are an ecclesiastical union joined by mutual agreement on the importance  
889 of genuine partnership and unity among churches. No separation of such a  
890 union should be taken lightly or unadvisedly, but soberly, carefully, and only  
891 in light of strong reasons of conscience or compatibility, and then only after  
892 earnest and extensive efforts have been made to preserve our unity in the  
893 Spirit. There may arise by necessity a time in which a local church for the  
894 reason of a change of doctrine or other unforeseen compelling reasons can no  
895 longer continue to be part of Trinity Fellowship Churches. Upon separation,  
896 Trinity Fellowship Churches has no right to the property of a local church, and  
897 the local church has no right to the property of Trinity Fellowship Churches.

898 7.2.2 Process

899 7.2.2.1 If a church is considering leaving TFC, its elders should contact the  
900 Regional Chairman and discuss its reasons with him prior to reaching  
901 a final decision.

902 7.2.2.2 If the local church, through its elders, decides to pursue separation, its  
903 elders must notify their RA in writing of their decision of intent to  
904 withdraw from TFC.

905 7.2.2.3 At least 30 days prior to withdrawal, the elders of that local church  
906 shall appear before the Judicial Review Committee of their RA in  
907 order to give reason(s) for leaving.

908 7.2.2.4 The Judicial Review Committee of that RA shall, for the good of the  
909 local church and our union, examine in earnest the reasons stated for  
910 leaving.

911 7.2.2.5 If the Judicial Review Committee accepts the reasons for withdrawal  
912 to be valid, then the JRC will recommend to the RA of Elders that the  
913 local church be commended to the Lord and his grace and freed to  
914 leave without censure. Valid reasons include, e.g., a non-heretical  
915 disagreement with the Trinity Confession of Faith, a theological  
916 inability to submit to the explicit mandates of the TFC Book of  
917 Church Order, or a practical inability to participate in the partnership  
918 of TFC.

919 7.2.2.6 If the Judicial Review Committee finds that the eldership of the  
920 departing church is (a) heretical (i.e., its errors present a grave and  
921 immediate threat to the spiritual welfare of church members), (b)  
922 guilty of unrepented scandalous sin, (c) has engaged in blatantly  
923 divisive and destructive behavior (i.e., explicitly making/condoning  
924 charges against TFC members outside of the appropriate church

925                               judicatories), then the JRC shall propose to the GA a censure against  
926                               the eldership stating the reasons why it believes the departure is  
927                               wrong.

928                               7.2.2.7 If the Judicial Review Committee finds that an eldership is departing  
929                               for reasons that do not honor the gravity of ecclesiastical union, it  
930                               may propose to the RA the issue of a comment that neither censures  
931                               nor commends the eldership's decision. Under such circumstances, the  
932                               JRC and the RA are advised to exercise charity and restraint.

933                               7.2.2.8 After hearing the Judicial Review Committee's proposal, the RA shall  
934                               determine, by a simple majority vote, whether to commend, censure,  
935                               or simply comment upon the local church's departure.

936                               7.2.2.9 A copy of the commendation, censure, or comment will be sent to all  
937                               elderships in TFC for them to communicate to their congregations as  
938                               they deem appropriate.

939                               **7.2.3 Appeals**

940                               Any eldership may appeal the terms of separation, including the content of any  
941                               departure letter, up to 12 months after separation. This appeal will be handled  
942                               as a trial and be adjudicated by the Court of Appeals of the General Assembly  
943                               of TFC according to the *Recommendations and Requirements for Discipline*  
944                               *and Adjudications for Trinity Fellowship Churches* (RRDA)

945 **8 Discipline**

946 **8.1 General Principles**

947 Trinity Fellowship Churches are committed to obeying the Scripture's commands to  
948 provide processes of discipline for health and protection within our individual  
949 churches.<sup>66</sup> These processes are to be biblical, just, and maintained with truth and  
950 grace at every level (local or regional adjudications, member discipline, elder  
951 discipline).

952 8.1.1 Church discipline is given by Christ to his Church to promote the glory of  
953 Christ, godliness, and purity,<sup>67</sup> to provide a venue for the possible rescue of  
954 members who have become hardened by sin,<sup>68</sup> and to provide justice,  
955 correction, and protections between members during conflict.<sup>69</sup>

956 8.1.2 At every level (local, regional, etc.), discipline within TFC is to be organized  
957 and carried out in a consistent manner by ordained TFC elders as outlined in  
958 the *TFC Recommendations and Requirements for Discipline and Adjudication*  
959 (RRDA). Each church must ensure that there is full compliance in printed  
960 words (e.g., church handbooks, policies, by-laws) and in deeds (e.g., actual  
961 adjudications and church disciplinary hearings).

962 8.1.3 Before any disciplinary actions are taken, appropriate efforts to draw members  
963 to healthy and peaceable interactions and reconciliation should be pursued if  
964 possible (e.g., through mediation, etc., see BCO 2.3).

965 8.1.4 This section assumes that the laws of all relevant civil authorities apply and is  
966 in no way intended to supersede or counteract such laws. Whether or not civil  
967 law requires, all TFC elders and staff of churches in the United States are  
968 mandatory reporters as outlined in BCO 6.1.3.

969 **8.2 Reconciliation, Mediation and Conflict Resolution**

970 Biblical peacemaking seeks to lead parties in conflict to reconciliation and conflict  
971 resolution that honors the unity and peace we have in the gospel.<sup>70</sup> Biblical  
972 peacemaking is one of the highest priorities for a Christian.<sup>71</sup> An offended or injured  
973 party should not pursue prosecution of another Christian without first seeking biblical  
974 reconciliation. If a formal process is required to achieve reconciliation, the parties will  
975 agree to function according to the principles and processes laid forth in the RRDA.  
976 Any party involved in a potential adjudication shall fill out the Checklist for Biblical  
977 Peacemaking in Appendix IV of the RRDA prior to pursuing adjudication. In addition,  
978 each church in TFC shall have a mediation and conflict resolution policy as part of

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<sup>66</sup> Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-6:8; etc.

<sup>67</sup> 1 Cor. 5:7-8

<sup>68</sup> Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Cor. 5:5

<sup>69</sup> 1 Cor. 6:1-8

<sup>70</sup> Eph. 4:1-3; Phi. 2:1-5

<sup>71</sup> Matt. 5:23-24, 18:15-16; Rom. 12:16-18; Gal. 6:1; Phil. 4:2-3



979 their church discipline policy. Local elders must instruct and lead their congregation in  
980 the practices of church discipline and biblical peacemaking.

### 981 **8.3 Witnesses and Evidence**

#### 982 8.3.1 General principles

983 All adjudications are to be carried along in the principles of truthfulness as  
984 shown in Scripture, as in the eighth commandment: “You shall not bear false  
985 witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16). It is our Lord's commandment that  
986 justice and protections are provided to all people at every point of any trial. In  
987 any adjudication, the words spoken, the witness's testimony, and evidence  
988 provided that form the substance of any case must be established as true and  
989 must be corroborated by other sources, keeping with the principle of “more  
990 than one witness” (Matt. 18:16; Deut. 19:15). Due to the corruptive nature of  
991 our hearts, special attention must be given to maintain justice and truth in the  
992 receiving of witnesses and evidence. One person's word is often as good as  
993 another's, and therefore no individual is to be declared guilty on the basis of a  
994 single testimony. Furthermore, we will assume all parties remain innocent until  
995 proven guilty through due process.

996 In all proceedings, extra care must be taken to ensure that all parties involved  
997 in the adjudication (plaintiff, defendant, accuser, potential victim, witnesses,  
998 etc.) are treated fairly and are afforded all necessary protections and care  
999 dynamics.<sup>72</sup> Victims of physical or sexual abuse are neither required nor  
1000 advised to meet face-to-face with their abuser.

#### 1001 8.3.2 Credibility

1002 Credibility is the veracity that might be applied to the word and character of a  
1003 witness. When discerning a witness's credibility, the adjudicating elders may  
1004 take into consideration anything that might reflect on the witness's truthfulness  
1005 in testimony. Their consideration might include the witness's relationship and  
1006 history with the accused and/or other witnesses, their quality of understanding  
1007 and insight into the matters on hand, their tone and demeanor while making  
1008 accusations, the tested quality of their life and standing in fellowship, and what  
1009 they seek to gain from the outcome.

##### 1010 8.3.2.1 Witnesses of Character

1011 Extra prudence is required whenever the plaintiff or a supporting  
1012 witness is known to:

1013 8.3.2.1.1 Harbor ill will or a vengeful spirit against the defendant

1014 8.3.2.1.2 Be hasty in judgment or quick to accuse

1015 8.3.2.1.3 Lack integrity

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<sup>72</sup> Although not mandated for local adjudications, the processes for these protections are spelled out in RRDA 8.3.3 and 6.4.1, et. al.

- 1016 8.3.2.1.4 Have a reputation for dishonesty  
1017 8.3.2.1.5 Be under discipline or a process of discipline themselves  
1018 8.3.2.1.6 Possess a conflict of interest or would benefit from the  
1019 defendant being found guilty
- 1020 8.3.3 Admissibility<sup>73</sup>  
1021 Witnesses and evidence that are put forward during an adjudication must meet  
1022 one of the following criteria in order to be admissible:
- 1023 8.3.3.1 There are at least one or two other credible witnesses who have  
1024 registered similar relevant and reliable concerns.<sup>74</sup>
- 1025 8.3.3.2 There are at least two pieces of clear evidence produced that would  
1026 lead to a just cause for the accusation to be admitted for a hearing.
- 1027 8.3.3.3 There is one piece of evidence that cannot be contrived and is beyond  
1028 a reasonable doubt in the estimation of the Moderator and/or panel  
1029 (e.g., video or audio footage, court records from a court of law,  
1030 official police report).
- 1031 8.3.3.4 Evidence needed to determine guilt must be clear and convincing.  
1032 This means that the guilt of the party is highly likely, though not  
1033 necessarily beyond a reasonable doubt. This is the second highest  
1034 level of evidence used in establishing guilt.<sup>75</sup>

## 1035 8.4 Local Church Discipline

- 1036 8.4.1 Elderships are to maintain local church discipline as shown in Scripture as a  
1037 necessary and ongoing part of church leadership for the health of the church  
1038 and for God's glory. Church discipline should be enacted whenever a believer  
1039 is caught in serious sin,<sup>76</sup> and the steps of discipline (Matt. 18) should  
1040 commence forward as the person demonstrates a clear lack of repentance and  
1041 response to the intervention and care of the church (i.e., “not listening”). Each  
1042 church should have an established and documented church discipline policy.  
1043 Each church in TFC should provide biblical teaching on the biblical principles  
1044 of church discipline. No person should be allowed to join a TFC church  
1045 without agreeing to abide by and submit to their local church discipline

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<sup>73</sup> See RRDA, page 82 for specific instructions to the process of admitting and evaluating evidence

<sup>74</sup> See Appendix 3 of the RRDA

<sup>75</sup> Traditionally, there are four levels of evidence required to establish fault, from least to greatest. They are 1) substantial evidence, 2) preponderance of evidence, 3) clear and convincing evidence and 4) evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. See <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/legal-standards-proof.html> et al for more information.

<sup>76</sup> Titus 3:10-11; 1 Cor. 6:9-10

1046 processes. Each church should inform its members of the appeal processes for  
1047 adjudications.<sup>77</sup>

1048 8.4.2 Ordained elders are to oversee church discipline. Only ordained elders are to  
1049 adjudicate in church discipline cases. In cases where there are not enough  
1050 elders present locally to comprise an adjudicatory panel, the Region will  
1051 supply the needed ordained elders.

1052 8.4.3 The steps outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 should be followed carefully and  
1053 privacy protected for all involved. The initial steps are private, informal, and  
1054 gradual. The discipline moves forward in the steps and becomes formal if the  
1055 elders uphold the veracity of the charge(s), and the person continues to be  
1056 unrepentant. The steps of church discipline should be as follows:

1057 8.4.3.1 **First step:** “Go tell him his fault, between you and him alone” (Matt.  
1058 18:15). If a church member confesses to or is caught in serious sin or  
1059 commits a sin against another believer, the person sinned against or  
1060 who is witness to or has evidence of their brother's sin(s), in most  
1061 cases, approaches the brother in private, bringing their evidence and  
1062 appeals to repentance.

1063 8.4.3.2 **Second step:** “If he doesn't listen, take one or two others along with  
1064 you” (v. 16). If the attempt to privately exhort the accused brother is  
1065 met with a refusal to listen (i.e., unrepentant refusal to comply with  
1066 concerns), then the person who was sinned against or who witnessed  
1067 sin(s) or has evidence of the brother's sin involves other church  
1068 members (one or more), including the local church elders. If the  
1069 elders uphold the veracity of the charge(s) and the person continues to  
1070 be unrepentant, this process transitions from informal to formal  
1071 church discipline. This step results in the widening of the circle of  
1072 people involved to bring appropriate credibility to the concerns and  
1073 additional loving appeals to the brother caught in sin. At times, this  
1074 step will result in reconciliation due to repentance or due to the  
1075 correcting of the misjudgment of the accusing party, as the “one or  
1076 two others” involved bring increased objectivity.

1077 8.4.3.3 **Third step:** “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (v.  
1078 17a). Should the unrepentant brother refuse to comply with the  
1079 concerns and calls to repentance from the widening circle of church  
1080 members involved in seeking to help restore him, then the broader  
1081 church gets involved in a meaningful way to provide further  
1082 objectivity and aid to the concerns of the persons' involved in seeking  
1083 the accused brother's restoration. This third step will be some variant

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<sup>77</sup> See RRDA 5.1.3

1084 of a final call to the unrepentant brother from the church under the  
1085 directive of elders.

1086 8.4.3.4 **Final step:** “If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to  
1087 you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (v. 17b). The final step, known  
1088 as “excommunication,” occurs when the person who has been proven  
1089 as unrepentant through the first three steps of church discipline is now  
1090 removed from the church and is no longer a member in good standing.  
1091 That individual is to be treated as a non-Christian, as their behavior  
1092 and their profession are inconsistent – they are bearing bad fruit like  
1093 an unbeliever. Therefore, the church will relate differently to the  
1094 excommunicated person, no longer offering them the Christian  
1095 fellowship that being members together once held before the church  
1096 discipline process was necessary.

1097 8.4.4 At every point during church discipline, the goal is one of merciful reclamation  
1098 and repentance.<sup>78</sup> This goal should be demonstrated at all points through the  
1099 tone and content of communication. Even if ending with excommunication, the  
1100 process of discipline should always leave room for future repentance and  
1101 restoration. It is the duty of elderships to decide when to readmit the penitent to  
1102 the fellowship of the church.<sup>79</sup> It is the duty of congregants to forgive, comfort,  
1103 and reaffirm their love for such a one.<sup>80</sup>

1104 8.4.5 If an eldership refuses to hear charges of a doctrinal or publicly scandalous  
1105 nature and two other elderships file charges with the TFC Judicial Review  
1106 Committee, the JRC shall commence an investigation that may lead to  
1107 adjudications.

1108 8.4.6 Appeals to judgments rendered in church discipline hearings may be appealed  
1109 to the TFC JRC and the Court of Appeals along the established channels  
1110 provided in section 42 of the *RRDA*.

## 1111 **8.5 Discipline of Elders**

### 1112 8.5.1 Due Process

1113 At times there will be accusations made towards an elder within TFC, or an  
1114 elder may be caught in sin or confess to a serious moral failure. It is at these  
1115 times that a particular process should be enacted that is commensurate to the  
1116 office they fill. Scripture commands that we treat elders in particular ways  
1117 under these conditions. For any accusation brought to an eldership concerning  
1118 one or more of their elders, care must be taken in processing the credibility of  
1119 witnesses/evidence in obedience to 1 Tim. 5:19, which states, “Do not admit a  
1120 charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

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<sup>78</sup> Galatians 6:1-2

<sup>79</sup> 2 Cor. 2:6-8

<sup>80</sup> 2 Cor. 2:7-8

- 1121 Local elders are to decide whether evidence or witness testimonies are  
1122 credible, as it is only through the governing officers of the church that  
1123 accusations are evaluated and determined as admissible. If there are no other  
1124 corroborating witnesses or clear pieces of evidence provided, the accusations  
1125 may be dismissed.
- 1126 Should an elder confess to serious sin or even be accused of such sins, either  
1127 the accused elder or the other local elders shall immediately contact their  
1128 Regional Leader and the Chairman of the Judicial Review Committee for the  
1129 purpose of seeking counsel and possible aid in complying with the RRDA in  
1130 the adjudication process.
- 1131 The care taken in processing any accusations against an elder is both to protect  
1132 the church against wayward elders and to protect elders against wayward  
1133 church members. A proper due process will balance both of these concerns and  
1134 will require that:
- 1135 8.5.1.1 Accusations must be made within two years of the offense(s),  
1136 excepting any time officially pursuing peacemaking/mediation  
1137 regarding the accusations. Notwithstanding this requirement, any  
1138 allegation involving sexual misconduct or illegal activity may be  
1139 brought without timeframe limitation. . Notwithstanding this  
1140 requirement, any allegation involving sexual misconduct or illegal  
1141 activity may be brought without timeframe limitation.
- 1142 8.5.1.2 The accused elder has the right to face his accuser(s) unless the  
1143 charge stems from a minor.
- 1144 8.5.2 Grounds for Discipline of an Elder
- 1145 The grounds of the accusation must be upon a documented and serious breach  
1146 of sound doctrine (as outlined in the *Trinity Confession of Faith*) or an offense  
1147 that would disqualify an elder from their office.<sup>81</sup> See RRDA 6.5.4 for the  
1148 outline of admissible charges.
- 1149 8.5.3 Results of adjudications
- 1150 Results will be one of the following: Cleared of charges, private rebuke, public  
1151 rebuke, removal from office, and church discipline, all as further outlined in  
1152 the *RRDA*.
- 1153 8.5.4 Suspension of Elders
- 1154 Should an elder be accused of serious criminal or scandalous sin, the remaining  
1155 elders may, at their own discretion, temporarily suspend the accused elder from  
1156 his office and its duties with or without pay until an adjudicatory panel rules on  
1157 the matter. In a case where the eldership decides to suspend pay, if the elder is

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<sup>81</sup> Qualifications stated in 1 Tim. 3:1-8; Titus 1:5-9 and as described in BCO 8.4.1

1158 ultimately cleared of the charges, he must receive his withheld pay in full. Two  
1159 unaccused elders are required to approve this action. If there are not two  
1160 remaining unaccused elders, the JRC will supply the necessary elders for the  
1161 adjudicatory panel. In a situation where there is only one elder, and he is the  
1162 accused, the Region will assume responsibility for the care of the church. The  
1163 Regional Leader will coordinate that care. The financial assets of the church  
1164 remain under the control of the local church officers or their delegates.

1165 8.5.4.1 Charges against an Eldership

1166 Should the actions or decisions of an entire eldership create grounds  
1167 for an admissible charge (BCO 8.5.2), the charge may be brought by  
1168 an individual, individual elder, or another eldership as outlined in  
1169 RRDA 6 & 7. Additionally, persistent failure to uphold the  
1170 requirements of the TFC BCO or the TFC Partnership Agreement is  
1171 also a ground for charges against an eldership.

1172 Should an entire eldership be removed and their local church  
1173 members desire to remain in partnership with TFC, they should  
1174 consult the Chairman of the Church Partnerships Committee  
1175 (information found at [info@TrinityFellowshipChurches.com](mailto:info@TrinityFellowshipChurches.com)).

1176 **8.6 Judicial Review Committees**

1177 8.6.1 Appointment of the Judicial Review Committee

1178 The Regional Assembly will install a *minimum* of five elders to the Judicial  
1179 Review Committee.<sup>82</sup> The JRC will provide the necessary adjudicatory body  
1180 for all appeals and adjudications that rise beyond the scope of a local eldership  
1181 and will provide counsel to local elderships in their own adjudications.

1182 Members of the Judicial Review Committee will serve six-year terms with no  
1183 term limits. If an elder resigns before his term is up, the Region nominates,  
1184 votes, and then appoints a replacement for the duration of the term, pending  
1185 confirmation from the RA by a simple majority vote.

1186 The JRC will be maintained as a minimum of five elders in a Region,  
1187 preferably from different churches, with each case heard by three members of  
1188 the committee. Men are assigned to a case through a blind draw. An elder may  
1189 be exempted from inclusion in a case for various reasons, from time constraints  
1190 to conflicts of interest. If necessary, JRC members may be shared between  
1191 regions serving on adjudication panels if approved by both regions.

1192 8.6.2 Powers and Responsibilities of the Judicial Review Committee

1193 8.6.2.1 The Judicial Review Committee should serve as a resource for  
1194 informal counsel to elderships walking through a 1 Timothy 5:19-21

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<sup>82</sup> See BCO 4.2.5

- 1195 proceeding at the local level. This is to ensure that the procedural  
1196 elements of discipline are followed.
- 1197 8.6.2.2 A local eldership should not publicly rebuke or remove an elder  
1198 without the involvement of the Judicial Review Committee.
- 1199 8.6.2.3 In these instances, the JRC is not weighing in on the guilt or  
1200 innocence of the elder but assisting in ensuring that a fair and just  
1201 process has been carried out according to the procedures spelled out  
1202 in the RRDA.
- 1203 8.6.2.4 The Judicial Review Committee will also serve as a body of appeal  
1204 for church members who have been disciplined or removed from  
1205 membership. The JRC must hear the appeal of any excommunicated  
1206 member if it is made within the allotted time frame through the  
1207 appropriate channels (See RRDA 42).
- 1208 8.6.2.5 If a charge is brought against an elder but is not admitted by the  
1209 Moderator, the person bringing the charge may appeal to the Judicial  
1210 Review Committee. The JRC will determine whether or not the case  
1211 shall be heard by the local Panel.
- 1212 8.6.2.6 The Judicial Review Committee will be a place of appeal for any  
1213 elder who is removed by a local Panel. The JRC must hear the appeal  
1214 of any trial decision regarding an elder at the local level (if the appeal  
1215 is made within the allotted time frame). This result will be a binding  
1216 decision in which the elder in question is cleared of charges, privately  
1217 or publicly rebuked, or removed from office.<sup>83</sup>
- 1218 8.6.2.7 The Judicial Review Committee will serve as the original adjudicating  
1219 body for the trial of an accused elder in the case where a local  
1220 eldership is too small to adequately deal with the matter. In such a  
1221 case, the TFC Court of Appeals would handle any further appeal.
- 1222 8.6.2.8 A local panel has the recourse of appeal to the TFC Court of Appeals  
1223 should they disagree with any judgment by the JRC that overturns  
1224 their prior verdict. However, the decision of the JRC should be  
1225 enacted, even while the appeals process continues.
- 1226 8.6.2.9 When the JRC has the original jurisdiction in the case of an accused  
1227 elder when the local eldership is too small to adequately deal with the  
1228 matter, once their Panel renders a decision, the execution of that  
1229 decision shall be the exclusive responsibility of the unaccused local

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<sup>83</sup> Such decisions are binding by the authority of this partnership of churches. In TFC, where authority is delegated to denominational leaders, such as in the JRC, it is nonetheless a real authority within our partnership.

1230 elder(s). Should there be no unaccused elders, the execution of the  
1231 decision shall be the exclusive responsibility of the JRC.

1232 8.6.2.10 Charges Against Denominational Leaders and Committee Members

1233 8.6.2.10.1 Charges against denominational leaders that generally  
1234 pertain to their qualification as elders will be handled  
1235 according to the usual chain of jurisdiction for an elder:  
1236 local Panel, Judicial Review Committee, TFC Court of  
1237 Appeals.

1238 8.6.2.10.2 Each committee will have specific agreed-upon  
1239 responsibilities, policies, and procedures, including the  
1240 circumstances that are appropriate to the removal of an  
1241 elder from a committee (BCO 4.4.3 et al.)

1242 8.6.2.11 Removal of a Church from TFC due to BCO non-compliance

1243 Any church that willfully, demonstrably, and consistently fails to  
1244 comply with the explicit mandates of the BCO over the period of two  
1245 or more years may be removed from the partnership per the decision  
1246 of the JRC following the trial procedures outlined in the RRDA.

1247 **8.7 The Court of Appeals**

1248 8.7.1 Candidates for the TFC Court of Appeals are drawn from the members of the  
1249 Regional Judicial Review Committees. They shall be nominated by any three  
1250 GA members. Nominations shall be submitted to GA members at least 30 days  
1251 before meeting. They shall be elected by popular vote according to BCO 3.2.  
1252 Members of the TFC Court of Appeal are Appellate Elders. These Appellate  
1253 Elders will be appointed to six-year terms, with no term limits.

1254 8.7.2 The number of Jurists will correspond to the number of Regions. The  
1255 minimum number of jurists shall be 5. If there are not enough regions,  
1256 additional jurists may be drawn from any region to make up the minimum. The  
1257 General Assembly may appoint additional jurists to serve on the Court of  
1258 Appeals on an ad-hoc basis by special meeting with at least a 15-day notice.  
1259 Such jurists need only serve for the current adjudicatory issue. Any two GA  
1260 delegates may call for such a special meeting in this case. Voting for ad-hoc  
1261 Appellate Elders may be done electronically and remotely.

1262 8.7.3 When a case is appealed, three Jurists will be assigned to determine whether  
1263 they will hear the case.

1264 8.7.4 When an appeal is heard by the TFC Court of Appeals, the Appellate Elders  
1265 from the Region in which the charge originated will recuse themselves in order  
1266 to prevent a conflict of interest. Should there be insufficient Appellate Elders,  
1267 Appellate Elders from the respective Region may serve if they did not



- 1268 previously serve as elders in the particular case. Additionally, Appellate Elders  
1269 appointed per BCO 8.7.3 may serve.
- 1270 8.7.5 A blind draw will be used to assign three Jurists to a case.
- 1271 8.7.6 Responsibilities of the TFC Court of Appeals
- 1272 8.7.6.1 The Court of Appeals shall conduct all adjudications according to the  
1273 RRDA.
- 1274 8.7.6.2 The TFC Court of Appeals has the right to review or not review any  
1275 appeal of a case that has previously been decided by a Regional  
1276 Judicial Review Committee. Any decision of a Regional Judicial  
1277 Review Committee may be appealed to the TFC Court of Appeals by  
1278 either party to the decision, by an eldership, or by a Panel whose  
1279 judgment has been overruled.
- 1280 8.7.6.3 In any case where the Regional Judicial Review Committee has  
1281 assumed original jurisdiction for a local church case and conducted a  
1282 trial, the TFC Court of Appeals must hear the case if it is appealed.  
1283 The TFC Court of Appeals may not decline to hear such a case.
- 1284 8.7.6.4 The Court has the right to uphold or overturn the decision of a  
1285 regional court and is not bound to grant another trial.
- 1286 8.7.6.5 Censure or Removal of a Region from TFC
- 1287 8.7.6.5.1 Circumstances requiring the censure or removal of a  
1288 Region include:
- 1289 8.7.6.5.1.1 *Persistent deviation from the TFC Statement of Faith*
- 1290 8.7.6.5.1.2 *Persistent divisive behavior (e.g., making or condoning*  
1291 *charges against TFC members outside of the appropriate*  
1292 *judicatories)*
- 1293 8.7.6.5.1.3 *Unrepentant sin on the part of the elders*
- 1294 8.7.6.5.1.4 *Persistent failure to uphold the TFC BCO or the TFC*  
1295 *Partnership Agreement*
- 1296 8.7.6.5.2 Charges against a region must be brought by the lesser of  
1297 either ten members or twenty-five percent of the General  
1298 Assembly. Elders and elderships within a Region who  
1299 register their dissent against the position or action of the  
1300 Region will be exempted from censure or removal.
- 1301 8.7.6.5.3 If the TFC Court of Appeals decides to hear charges  
1302 brought against a region, then after any necessary recusals,  
1303 a blind draw will be used to assign five elders to the case. If  
1304 less than five Jurists remain after recusals, then all of them  
1305 shall try the case.

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- 1306 8.7.6.5.4 The TFC Court of Appeals will render one of the following  
1307 judgments: Not Guilty or Censure or Removal.
- 1308 8.7.6.5.5 If the judgment is for censure, the General Assembly will  
1309 finalize or overturn the decision by a simple majority vote.
- 1310 8.7.6.5.6 If the judgment is for removal, a two-thirds majority vote  
1311 by the General Assembly will finalize the decision of the  
1312 TFC Court of Appeals.
- 1313 8.7.6.5.7 If the judgment of the TFC Court of Appeals is not upheld  
1314 by a two-thirds majority, it will immediately initiate a  
1315 simple majority vote by the General Assembly on whether  
1316 to censure the Region.