

# **Trinity Fellowship**



## **Churches**

# **Book of Church Order**

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# Trinity Fellowship Churches Book of Church Order

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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” was 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.

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- 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.

205        **2.7 Denominational Leaders**

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

214            We understand that God uses gifted men to serve in various functions beyond the local  
215            church for the greater good of the Church and her mission.<sup>49</sup> Some in TFC would  
216            understand such functions to be apostolic or even the functions of a modern-day  
217            “small-a” apostle.<sup>50</sup> Others would understand such functions as simply necessary for  
218            the health and mission of the overall Church and thus most naturally fulfilled by those  
219            with the appropriate gifts. We believe that the various committees and their chairmen  
220            within TFC are appropriate places for those so gifted and elected within TFC. We also  
221            expect that there will be multiple opportunities for such men to serve within TFC that  
222            do not require a formal role yet still are under proper biblical authority. All TFC roles,  
223            formal or informal, are under the authority of the elders of TFC, serve at their behest,  
224            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 inter-dependently. 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 voluntary. But this does not mean such partnerships are trivial. Local churches can  
247 choose to cooperate at very deep levels to best ensure their respective and collective  
248 fidelity and fruitfulness in light of the truths of Scripture. Such cooperation can  
249 involve the oversight and care of denominational leadership and the employment of  
250 the God-given gifts of such leaders. No actions or decisions shall be made by any  
251 office, staff, or committee apart from the explicit authorization of the elders as  
252 documented in the BCO, the Confession of Faith, and official decisions appropriately  
253 ratified by the General Assembly (see BCO 4.3).

254 **3.3 Voting In Our Partnership**

255 All denominational elections shall be by nomination and popular election by local  
256 church elders. Only individuals actively serving as a local elder in a TFC church may  
257 vote in a Regional Assembly or in the General Assembly. A quorum consists of at

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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.

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258 least half of the voting members of the respective electing body. A quorum must be  
259 present for all binding votes. Representatives who are unable to travel shall be allowed  
260 to participate and vote via teleconference. When multiple seats are being filled, this  
261 popular vote shall require a minimum of 25% of the respective electing body  
262 (Quorum). When one office is being filled, the threshold shall be a simple majority.  
263 Runoffs may be necessary. All popular votes in this BCO require this same approach.  
264 All terms shall commence at the beginning of the next calendar year unless indicated  
265 otherwise. If there are more than a majority of committee members who have the same  
266 term lengths, they must cast lots to stagger their terms by plus or minus one year so  
267 that no more than half of them will expire simultaneously.

268 With all of the above convictions in mind, the following sections describe the nature,  
269 scope, forms, and function of our partnership.

270 **4 Forms of Our Partnership**

271 **4.1 Cohorts**

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

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

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

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

296 The Cohort's prime goals are:

- 297 1. To build strong relationships among elders and church members in the Cohort.
- 298 2. To encourage, care for, and mentor fellow elders and elder candidates for optimal  
299 pastoral health.
- 300 3. To cooperate in church life and mission in a substantial way that best serves the  
301 Cohort churches.

302 **4.2 Regional Assemblies**

303 4.2.1 Overview

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

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

### 312 4.2.2 Regional Assembly Meetings

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

### 317 4.2.3 Forming Regions

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

### 321 4.2.4 Regional Chairman

322 The RA shall elect one of their elders to serve as Chairman. The Regional  
323 Chairman is to provide leadership to the Region as a steward of the  
324 responsibilities and authority given to him by the RA and its elders. Any three  
325 RA elders can nominate an elder to fill this role. Nominations shall be  
326 submitted to the RA 30 days before the election. The Chairman is elected by  
327 popular vote. He shall serve a three-year term. He shall serve no more than two  
328 consecutive terms. The Chairman will help to facilitate the function of the RA  
329 through communication, organization, and example. His primary  
330 responsibilities are to organize the RA meetings and to ensure the healthy  
331 function of RA Committees in accordance with the BCO. If possible, the  
332 Region should choose by popular vote a moderator distinct from the Chairman  
333 to facilitate the meetings. The Chairman may moderate RA gatherings. The  
334 Moderator shall use the rules chosen by the popular vote of the RA. The RA  
335 churches should consider how to best support the Chairman in his efforts,  
336 including financial compensation, as needed.

### 337 4.2.5 Regional Committees

338 As needed, the RA shall elect the necessary committee members. Committees  
339 shall have a minimum of three members. The Judicial Review Committee shall  
340 have a minimum of five members. These members shall be nominated by any  
341 three RA elders and elected by a popular vote (see BCO-3.3). Nominations  
342 need to be submitted to the RA 30 days before the election. The committee  
343 members are elected by a popular vote. They shall serve a three-year term.  
344 They may serve multiple terms.

#### 345 4.2.5.1 Regional Committees Chairmen

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

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

353 4.2.5.2 Regional Planting and Partnership Committee

354 Regional Assemblies shall elect a Regional Planting and Partnership  
355 Committee that is qualified to process and oversee all church plants and new  
356 church partnerships in their Region per Recommendations and Requirements  
357 for Church Plants and Partnerships. Churches that are added to TFC will do  
358 so by following the processes in these Recommendations and Requirements,  
359 signing all required partnership agreement documents (BCO 7), and being  
360 appropriately reviewed and received by a 2/3 majority vote of a quorum of  
361 the respective RA. The Recommendations and Requirements for Church  
362 Plants and Partnerships are subject to the approval of the GA.

363 4.2.5.3 Ordination Certification Committee

364 Regional Assemblies shall elect an Ordination Certification Committee that  
365 is qualified to process and oversee all ordinations in their Region per  
366 Recommendations and Requirements for Ordination Certification. The  
367 Recommendations and Requirements for Ordination Certification are subject  
368 to the approval of the GA.

369 4.2.5.4 Judicial Review Committee

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

374 4.2.5.5 Regional Finance Committee

375 Regional Assemblies shall elect a qualified Regional Finance Committee  
376 that is trained and equipped in church finance to organize and present a  
377 yearly budget in their Region per the Recommendations and Requirements  
378 for Finance Committees. The Recommendations and Requirements for  
379 Finance Committees are subject to the approval of the GA.

380 **4.3 General Assembly (GA)**

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

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- 388           4.3.1   Formation of Committees
- 389                   The GA shall form and oversee any committee (see BCO-4.4) they deem  
390                   necessary for the successful function of this association. Such committees will  
391                   serve at the will of the GA and report to the GA at least annually. Nominations  
392                   for committee members must be submitted at least 30 days before the meeting  
393                   of the GA. Committee members will be elected by the popular vote of the GA  
394                   (see BCO-3.2).
- 395           4.3.2   Confession of Faith
- 396                   The GA shall oversee the Confession of Faith and any proposed changes to the  
397                   Confession of Faith. Any changes to the Confession of Faith must be brought  
398                   by a GA Committee or any five GA representatives. Proposed changes to the  
399                   Confession of Faith should be submitted to the Theology Committee and  
400                   Oversight Committee for feedback at least 150 days before the meeting of the  
401                   GA. Finally, proposed changes must be submitted at least 120 days before the  
402                   meeting of the GA and can only be ratified by a  $\frac{3}{4}$  majority of the GA.
- 403           4.3.3   Book of Church Order
- 404                   The GA shall oversee the BCO. Any changes to the BCO must be brought by  
405                   any GA committee or any three GA representatives. Proposed changes to the  
406                   BCO should be submitted to the Polity Committee and Oversight Committee  
407                   for feedback at least 120 days before the meeting of the GA. Finally, proposed  
408                   changes must be submitted at least 90 days before the meeting of the GA and  
409                   can only be ratified by a  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority of the GA.
- 410           4.3.4   General Assembly Chairman
- 411                   4.3.4.1   The GA shall elect a Chairman annually from their own number. The  
412                   Chairman must be an objective moderator without conflicts of interest in his  
413                   role. He shall not be a voting member of the Oversight Committee nor paid  
414                   staff for TFC.
- 415                   4.3.4.2   The Chairman shall be nominated by at least three GA members and elected  
416                   by a popular vote (see BCO-3.2). Nominations for the GA Chairman must be  
417                   submitted at least 30 days before the meeting of the GA and will be elected  
418                   by the popular vote of the GA (see BCO-3.2).
- 419                   4.3.4.3   The Chairman will moderate the following meeting of the GA using *Robert's*  
420                   *Rules of Order* or an alternative set of rules approved by  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the GA.
- 421                   4.3.4.4   The Chairman will serve as the point of contact for establishing the agenda  
422                   for the annual meeting and any special meetings of the GA.
- 423                   4.3.4.5   Any three representatives may initiate a request for a special meeting  
424                   through the Chairman. The Chairman shall present the request from the  
425                   representatives verbatim to poll the GA in order to ascertain whether there is

426 25% or more of the GA interested in a special meeting. The poll results shall  
427 be made available to all GA representatives.

428 4.3.5 Motions and Reports

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

433 4.3.6 Contributions

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

440 4.3.7 Recommendations and Requirements

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

446 **4.4 Committees of the General Assembly<sup>59</sup>**

447 4.4.1 Overview of GA Committees

448 Committees shall consist of elders of TFC especially qualified for the duties of  
449 the respective committee. Committees may also contain exceptionally qualified  
450 advisory members from the churches of TFC who serve in an unofficial  
451 advisory capacity. Committees are tasked by the GA for specified purposes.  
452 Committees are to provide leadership to address specific goals as stewards of  
453 the responsibilities and authority given to them by the GA and its elders. They  
454 serve at the will of the GA and should orient themselves to best inform and  
455 equip the GA for making key decisions for TFC.

456 4.4.2 Appointments and Terms

457 Committee members shall be nominated by any three GA members and elected  
458 by popular vote (see BCO-3.2). All nominations for committee members must  
459 be received by the GA representatives 30 days prior to meeting. The number of  
460 committee members should be an odd number from a minimum of three up to  
461 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.

462 committee, they may invite and include advisory members to participate in  
463 their meetings and/or work, however, advisory members are not voting  
464 members and may not be empaneled in any adjudicatory proceedings. There  
465 may be no more than 50% as many advisory members as voting members in  
466 any committee. Whenever the voting body of a committee changes for any  
467 reason, a new affirmation vote must be taken prior to the inclusion of any  
468 advisory members in further committee activities. Any member in good  
469 standing in a TFC church is eligible to be an advisory member of a GA or RA  
470 committee. Any other individual must be affirmed by a majority vote of the  
471 respective governing body prior to inclusion as an advisory member of a  
472 committee. Notwithstanding the limitations on the number of advisory  
473 members, committees are free to invite consultants to bring advice to the  
474 committee on a short-term basis. Temporary committee members may be  
475 appointed should a committee member not be able to complete their term.  
476 Temporary committee members shall serve up to a one-year term, subject to  
477 re-election. Permanent committee members shall serve a three-year term.

478 4.4.3 Committee Chairmen

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

486 4.4.4 Chairman of the Oversight Committee

487 The Chairman of the Oversight Committee shall be nominated by any three  
488 GA members. Nominations shall be submitted to GA members at least 30 days  
489 before meeting. The Chairman shall be elected by popular vote to a three-year  
490 term. He shall serve no more than two consecutive terms. The Chairman will  
491 facilitate and coordinate the Oversight Committee's activities and serve as the  
492 President of TFC. As President, he serves as an important representative,  
493 communicator, and guardian of the foundational commitments, Book of  
494 Church Order, and Confession of Faith of Trinity Fellowship Churches, on  
495 behalf of the TFC General Assembly and its committees, and under their  
496 respective authority. He seeks to support and enhance the function of every  
497 element of TFC as a servant leader and spokesperson, under the authority of  
498 the elders of TFC as specified in the BCO. Accordingly, he will supply an  
499 annual review with recommendations to the General Assembly, on the  
500 faithfulness and fruitfulness of Trinity Fellowship Churches to their stated  
501 commitments, values, and practices found in the BCO, CoF, and related  
502 documents and practices.

503 4.4.5 Committee Reports

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

511 4.4.6 Permanent Committees

512 The following committees are permanent committees: Church Development  
513 Committee (CDC), Central Finance Committee (CFC), General Assembly  
514 Planting & Partnership Committee (GAPPC), Global Missions Committee  
515 (GMC), Oversight Committee (OC), Polity Committee (PC) and Theology  
516 Committee (TC).

517 Each of these permanent committees shall have members elected to a term of  
518 three years. The number of the respective committee members shall be 5 for  
519 the Church Development Committee (CDC), 3 for the Central Finance  
520 Committee (CFC), 3 for the Planting & Partnership Committee (PPC), no more  
521 than 5 for the Global Missions Committee (GMC), 5 for the Oversight  
522 Committee (OC), 3 for the Polity Committee (PC) and 5 for the Theology  
523 Committee (TC). Committee members shall all serve the GA in its decision-  
524 making authority. They may recommend budgets to be overseen by the  
525 Finance Committee and presented to the GA, and they may requisition and  
526 oversee staff as needed. Staff should be members of a TFC church. If they are  
527 not members, the respective committee shall present a yearly review and  
528 recommendation on the staff member to the fall General Assembly of TFC for  
529 a vote of continuing service.

530 4.4.6.1 Church Development Committee

531 The Church Development Committee shall work to establish  
532 Recommendations and Requirements related to pastoral ministry and  
533 church life. They shall also develop and disseminate any resources  
534 helpful for pastoral and church development, life, and mission. They  
535 shall organize and present appropriate conferences and seminars to  
536 best serve TFC with input from the Theology Committee, the  
537 Oversight Committee, and any other relevant committee. Their  
538 strategic plan for conferences and seminars must be approved by the  
539 GA before implementation. This plan shall be submitted as a report  
540 with appropriate motions to the GA.

541 4.4.6.2 Finance Committee

542 The Finance Committee shall coordinate with all other committees and staff  
543 and all motions involving financial expenditure. They shall receive proposals  
544 and work with the various parties to present a unified budget to the GA for

545 their approval. The Finance Committee's proposed budget shall be  
546 introduced as a committee report to be received, amended, and approved at  
547 the GA annual meeting.

548 4.4.6.3 General Assembly Planting & Partnership Committee

549 The General Assembly Planting & Partnership Committee shall oversee  
550 Recommendations and Requirements for the Planting and Partnership  
551 Committees in the Regions. The committee shall also develop and provide  
552 the necessary resources to support healthy and vigorous church planting and  
553 new partnerships among the regions and beyond in TFC.

554 4.4.6.4 Global Missions Committee

555 The Global Missions Committee shall oversee Recommendations and  
556 Requirements for the Global Missions work. This is a critical aspect of our  
557 mission. Its role is to provide clarity for our elders and churches. The target  
558 for this committee is the unreached peoples of the earth,<sup>60</sup> while the  
559 Planting & Partnership Committees will be concerned about church plants in  
560 areas being reached throughout the globe. They will research existing  
561 opportunities to help our local churches better steward the limited resources  
562 they have.

563 4.4.6.5 Oversight Committee

564 The Oversight Committee shall work with all the various committees to  
565 assist the GA Chairman in establishing an orderly agenda for the GA annual  
566 meeting. They shall present their reasoned input in response to all committee  
567 reports. They shall ensure corporate ethical, legal, and financial compliance  
568 for TFC and serve as the organizational board for non-profit law purposes.  
569 They shall steward the BCO and by-laws. The President and the Oversight  
570 Committee shall communicate for TFC by representing established values,  
571 documents, policies, and past, present, and planned activities. The committee  
572 may requisition and oversee staff to help accomplish their goals. Any  
573 executive staff of the Oversight Committee must be hired with a job  
574 description and financial compensation endorsed by the General Assembly.  
575 Further Recommendations and Requirements for the Oversight Committee  
576 shall be ratified by the GA.

577 4.4.6.6 Polity Committee

578 The Polity Committee shall oversee amendments to the Book of Church  
579 Order and offer their expert advice to the GA and its committees on any  
580 matter pertaining to the Book of Church Order. When a particular decision is  
581 required on the proper interpretation and application of the Book of Church

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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/>

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582 Order, the Polity Committee shall make a ruling that shall stand until the  
583 next GA meeting. At the next GA meeting, the GA must vote whether to  
584 uphold or override the ruling. This shall be done by a simple majority vote.  
585 The ruling must be submitted as a Polity Committee report to the GA. The  
586 Polity Committee will also develop Recommendations and Requirements for  
587 itself as needed. These must be ratified by the GA.

### 588 4.4.6.7 Theology Committee

589 The Theology Committee shall work to establish Recommendations and  
590 Requirements for Ordination Certification, including introducing any needed  
591 amendments or commentary. They shall also help steward the Trinity  
592 Confession of Faith by receiving and interacting over amendments,  
593 questions, or comments from TFC eldership, by proposing recommended  
594 amendments for the General Assembly, and by engaging and reporting to the  
595 GA on key theological issues related to the Confession of Faith.  
596 Additionally, the Theology Committee shall make recommendations to other  
597 committees related to key theological issues pertinent to TFC. The Theology  
598 Committee will also develop Recommendations and Requirements for itself  
599 as needed.

### 600 4.4.7 Forming New Committees

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

### 604 4.4.8 Removal of Committee Members

605 Each committee will define its duties and conduct per the Recommendations  
606 and Requirements for Committees and Assemblies stewarded by the Polity  
607 Committee. Committee members may be removed by their respective  
608 committee if a 2/3 majority of the committee vote and agree that the committee  
609 member has either been intentionally disruptive or consistently uncooperative,  
610 or persistently negligent in duty. He shall be removed immediately upon such a  
611 vote. Such removals may be appealed to the Court of Appeals by any member  
612 of the committee. The Court of Appeals must hear the respective case and  
613 render a decision based on the BCO, this paragraph included. Care must be  
614 taken both to consider the view of the majority of the committee but also to  
615 protect the committee member and TFC from unjust politicking or  
616 partisanship. It is better to err by retaining a difficult committee member than  
617 to harm the health that can come through including diverse perspectives on a  
618 committee.

619 **5 Fidelity of Our Partnership**

620 **5.1 Confession of Faith**

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

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

630 **5.2 Ordination Recommendations and Requirements**

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

641 **5.3 Church Discipline**

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

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

650 Each member church of TFC must have a clear and accessible policy of addressing  
651 charges against elders according to 1 Tim 5:19–21 and commit to practice it faithfully.  
652 Each church shall ensure members are aware of this policy and trained in its proper  
653 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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654 TFC agrees to allow appropriate appeals of church discipline and elder charges. The  
655 judgments rendered in such appeals will be duly honored as an official ruling of TFC.  
656 An appropriate response to any judgment shall be a condition of continued  
657 partnership. These appeals will follow the procedures outlined in the Rules of  
658 Discipline in this Book of Church Order.

659 **6 Fruitfulness of Our Partnership**

660 **6.1 Church Health**

661 6.1.1 Cooperation

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

671 6.1.2 Mediation Assistance

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

679 6.1.3 Abuse and Reporting Recommendations and Requirements in TFC

680 6.1.3.1 TFC Churches in the US

681 Church health must also include at least some statement about abuse  
682 and reporting standards. Every church will have their own abuse  
683 prevention and response policies and will be held accountable to that  
684 document. Each church's document will be filed with the Executive  
685 Administrator.

686 TFC churches must also comply with all relevant state laws that speak  
687 to these issues.

688 Elders and staff members in TFC churches and staff of TFC itself are  
689 mandatory reporters. They must report if a minor is believed to be at  
690 risk of abuse or neglect. The elder or staff member might hear about a  
691 minor currently at risk and must report this. Or, they might hear from  
692 an adult about his/her abuse where the abuser is still in a position to  
693 harm minors. In either case, TFC elders and church staff, and TFC  
694 employees must report this to the proper civil authorities.

695 6.1.3.2 TFC Churches Outside the US

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

699 6.1.4 Best Practices

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

705 **6.2 Pastoral Health**

706 6.2.1 Relationships

707 TFC will thrive according to the depth of relationships among its pastors and  
708 church members. While formal organization and agreement are necessary, it  
709 serves as a structure around which to build meaningful and Lord willing,  
710 lifelong relationships for the sake of Christ and his Church. Therefore, we urge  
711 all TFC elders to make it their personal goal to build strong relationships  
712 around this fellowship of churches. These relationships should be strongest  
713 among Cohorts and regions but should also exist across the entire  
714 denomination and the various geographical and cultural contexts within our  
715 fellowship.

716 6.2.2 Training & Mentoring

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

723 6.2.3 Best Practices

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

728 6.2.3.1 Repositioning or Removal of an Elder for Non-Disciplinary Reasons

729 Circumstances may arise such that an elder chooses to resign from  
730 office willingly for non-disciplinary reasons (i.e., not due to serious  
731 sin or other disciplinary reasons). Additionally, there may be various  
732 situations wherein an eldership decides to either reposition an elder to  
733 a different role within their eldership or to remove him from the

734 eldership for various reasons of team fit, competence, gifting, or even  
735 due to budgetary or scheduling realities. Not all resignation, removal  
736 or repositioning of an elder is considered disciplinary in nature, nor  
737 do all situations involving the resignation, removal or repositioning of  
738 an elder involve character disqualification. All eldership disciplinary  
739 situations are covered in BCO-8 and the RRDA. In non-disciplinary  
740 cases, elderships should consult the Church Development Committee  
741 and the relevant Recommendations and Requirements they generate  
742 on the topic. Any resignation, removal, or repositioning should ensure  
743 the elder is well cared for in the process and has recourse to appeal to  
744 the JRC should he believe he has been treated unjustly. Any elder  
745 who resigns or is removed for non-disciplinary reasons who remains  
746 qualified as an elder and a member in good standing may retain his  
747 ordination certification from TFC for at least one year but no more  
748 than three years. Only individuals actively serving as a local elder in  
749 a TFC church may vote in a Regional Assembly or in the General  
750 Assembly.

751 6.2.4 Accountability

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

761 **6.3 Evangelism**

762 6.3.1 Resources

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

771 6.3.2 Cooperation

772 Cohorts, Regions, and fellow churches within TFC should regularly and  
773 extensively cooperate in evangelism efforts. This should include exchanging  
774 teams and individuals dedicated to evangelistic and outreach efforts. This  
775 should include using gifted and trained evangelists to develop and lead efforts

776 among churches in a Region or Cohort or beyond. This should include  
777 donating financial gifts to efforts among the churches.

778 **6.4 Church Planting**

779 6.4.1 Resources

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

783 6.4.2 Cooperation

784 Cohorts, regions, and the entirety of TFC should partner together to advance  
785 church planting. This should include but not be limited to sponsoring  
786 internships, sending church planters to other churches, funding the training and  
787 development of church planters, donating to new church plants, and sending  
788 members of the church to be a part of a church plant.

789 6.4.3 Processes

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

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

799 **6.5 New Church Partnerships**

800 6.5.1 Resources

801 The Regional Planting and Partnership Committee, in cooperation with the GA  
802 Planting and Partnership Committee, shall develop and disseminate the  
803 resources needed for healthy and vigorous new church partnerships in the  
804 regions.

805 6.5.2 Cooperation

806 Cohorts, regions, and the entirety of TFC should partner together to advance  
807 new church partnerships. This should include but not be limited to reaching out  
808 to candidate churches and elders, including them in the various activities of our  
809 association, guiding them through the new partnership process, inviting them  
810 to the various pastoral gatherings among Cohorts, regions, and the GA, and  
811 providing funds for the candidate church to participate in various TFC  
812 activities.

813 6.5.3 Processes

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

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

820 **6.6 Global Missions**

821 6.6.1 Background

822 TFC exists to help fulfill the Great Commission's call to make disciples of all  
823 nations. We recognize that we do so alongside a long line of faithful and  
824 fruitful churches, missionaries, and agencies laboring throughout the world  
825 over many years. Therefore, we do not seek to operate independently or  
826 originally in our efforts. We seek to cooperate with any and all churches,  
827 missionaries, and agencies that will mutually benefit our efforts to fulfill the  
828 Great Commission. We prioritize efforts aimed at planting viable indigenous-  
829 led churches among the least-reached peoples of the world with the hope they  
830 will become part of TFC or a like-minded association of churches.<sup>65</sup>

831 6.6.2 Activities

832 Member churches should set apart a good portion of their regular budget to  
833 support global missions among the least-reached peoples of the world. Elders  
834 should encourage a culture among their churches of generous giving to this  
835 cause. Each Region should be active together in supporting strategic projects  
836 and efforts towards advancing global missions. This might include sponsoring  
837 and supporting sister churches in areas in close cultural or geographic  
838 proximity to target locales and cultures. The Global Missions Committee shall  
839 establish Recommendations and Requirements and funding avenues for work  
840 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/>

841 **7 Trinity Fellowship Churches Commitments**

842 **7.1 Partnership Agreement**

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

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

855 I, along with the eldership of my local church, will strive towards contributing 2% of  
856 our church's general fund income toward the support of TFC-wide functions, another  
857 4% of our church's general fund to regional functions, and another 4% of our general  
858 fund to mission work of our choice, beyond our local church, including regional and  
859 TFC-wide efforts in church planting and the global mission work of TFC.

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

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

869 *Signed:* \_\_\_\_\_ *Date:* \_\_\_\_\_

870 *Church:* \_\_\_\_\_

871 **7.2 Terminating a Partnership**

872 7.2.1 Principle

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

883 7.2.2 Process

884 7.2.2.1 If a church is considering leaving TFC, its elders should contact the  
885 Regional Chairman and discuss its reasons with him prior to reaching  
886 a final decision.

887 7.2.2.2 If the local church, through its elders, decides to pursue separation, its  
888 elders must notify their RA in writing of their decision of intent to  
889 withdraw from TFC.

890 7.2.2.3 At least 30 days prior to withdrawal, the elders of that local church  
891 shall appear before the Judicial Review Committee of their RA in  
892 order to give reason(s) for leaving.

893 7.2.2.4 The Judicial Review Committee of that RA shall, for the good of the  
894 local church and our union, examine in earnest the reasons stated for  
895 leaving.

896 7.2.2.5 If the Judicial Review Committee accepts the reasons for withdrawal  
897 to be valid, then the JRC will recommend to the RA of Elders that the  
898 local church be commended to the Lord and his grace and freed to  
899 leave without censure. Valid reasons include, e.g., a non-heretical  
900 disagreement with the Trinity Confession of Faith, a theological  
901 inability to submit to the explicit mandates of the TFC Book of  
902 Church Order, or a practical inability to participate in the partnership  
903 of TFC.

904 7.2.2.6 If the Judicial Review Committee finds that the eldership of the  
905 departing church is (a) heretical (i.e., its errors present a grave and  
906 immediate threat to the spiritual welfare of church members), (b)  
907 guilty of unrepented scandalous sin, (c) has engaged in blatantly  
908 divisive and destructive behavior (i.e., explicitly making/condoning  
909 charges against TFC members outside of the appropriate church

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910                               judicatories), then the JRC shall propose to the GA a censure against  
911                               the eldership stating the reasons why it believes the departure is  
912                               wrong.

913                               7.2.2.7 If the Judicial Review Committee finds that an eldership is departing  
914                               for reasons which do not honor the gravity of ecclesiastical union, it  
915                               may propose to the RA the issue of a comment which neither censures  
916                               nor commends the eldership's decision. Under such circumstances, the  
917                               JRC and the RA are advised to exercise charity and restraint.

918                               7.2.2.8 After hearing the Judicial Review Committee's proposal, the RA shall  
919                               determine, by a simple majority vote, whether to commend, censure,  
920                               or simply comment upon the local church's departure.

921                               7.2.2.9 A copy of the commendation, censure or comment will be sent to all  
922                               elderships in TFC for them to communicate to their congregations as  
923                               they deem appropriate.

924                               **7.2.3 Appeals**

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

930 **8 Discipline**

931 **8.1 General Principles**

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

937 8.1.1 Church discipline is given by Christ to his Church to promote the glory of  
938 Christ, godliness, and purity,<sup>67</sup> to provide a venue for the possible rescue of  
939 members who have become hardened by sin,<sup>68</sup> and to provide justice,  
940 correction, and protections between members during conflict.<sup>69</sup>

941 8.1.2 At every level (local, regional, etc.), discipline within TFC is to be organized  
942 and carried out in a consistent manner by ordained TFC elders as outlined in  
943 the TFC *Recommendations and Requirements for Discipline and Adjudication*  
944 (RRDA). Each church must ensure that there is full compliance in printed  
945 words (e.g., church handbooks, policies, by-laws) and in deeds (e.g., actual  
946 adjudications and church disciplinary hearings).

947 8.1.3 Before any disciplinary actions are taken, appropriate efforts to draw members  
948 to healthy and peaceable interactions and reconciliation should be pursued if  
949 possible (e.g., through mediation, etc., see BCO 2.3).

950 8.1.4 This section assumes that the laws of all relevant civil authorities apply and is  
951 in no way intended to supersede or counteract such laws. Whether or not civil  
952 law requires, all TFC elders and staff of churches in the United States are  
953 mandatory reporters as outlined in BCO 6.1.3.

954 **8.2 Reconciliation, Mediation and Conflict Resolution**

955 Biblical peacemaking seeks to lead parties in conflict to reconciliation and conflict  
956 resolution that honors the unity and peace we have in the gospel.<sup>70</sup> Biblical  
957 peacemaking is one of the highest priorities for a Christian.<sup>71</sup> An offended or injured  
958 party should not pursue prosecution of another Christian without first seeking biblical  
959 reconciliation. If a formal process is required to achieve reconciliation, the parties will  
960 agree to function according to the principles and processes laid forth in the RRDA.  
961 Any party involved in a potential adjudication shall fill out the Checklist for Biblical  
962 Peacemaking in Appendix IV of the RRDA prior to pursuing adjudication. In addition,  
963 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

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

966 **8.3 Witnesses and Evidence**

967 8.3.1 General principles

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

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

986 8.3.2 Credibility

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

995 8.3.2.1 Witnesses of Character

996 Extra prudence is required whenever the plaintiff or a supporting  
997 witness is known to:

998 8.3.2.1.1 Harbor ill will or a vengeful spirit against the defendant

999 8.3.2.1.2 Be hasty in judgment or quick to accuse

1000 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.

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- 1001 8.3.2.1.4 Have a reputation for dishonesty  
1002 8.3.2.1.5 Be under discipline or a process of discipline themselves  
1003 8.3.2.1.6 Possess a conflict of interest or would benefit from the  
1004 defendant being found guilty
- 1005 8.3.3 Admissibility<sup>73</sup>  
1006 Witnesses and evidence that are put forward during an adjudication must meet  
1007 one of the following criteria in order to be admissible:
- 1008 8.3.3.1 There are at least one or two other credible witnesses who have  
1009 registered similar relevant and reliable concerns.<sup>74</sup>
- 1010 8.3.3.2 There are at least two pieces of clear evidence produced that would  
1011 lead to a just cause for the accusation to be admitted for a hearing.
- 1012 8.3.3.3 There is one piece of evidence that cannot be contrived and is beyond  
1013 a reasonable doubt in the estimation of the Moderator and/or panel  
1014 (e.g., video or audio footage, court records from a court of law,  
1015 official police report).
- 1016 8.3.3.4 Evidence needed to determine guilt must be clear and convincing.  
1017 This means that the guilt of the party is highly likely, though not  
1018 necessarily beyond a reasonable doubt. This is the second highest  
1019 level of evidence used in establishing guilt.<sup>75</sup>

## 1020 **8.4 Local Church Discipline**

- 1021 8.4.1 Elderships are to maintain local church discipline as shown in Scripture as a  
1022 necessary and ongoing part of church leadership for the health of the church  
1023 and for God's glory. Church discipline should be enacted whenever a believer  
1024 is caught in serious sin,<sup>76</sup> and the steps of discipline (Matt. 18) should  
1025 commence forward as the person demonstrates a clear lack of repentance and  
1026 response to the intervention and care of the church (i.e., “not listening”). Each  
1027 church should have an established and documented church discipline policy.  
1028 Each church in TFC should provide biblical teaching on the biblical principles  
1029 of church discipline. No person should be allowed to join a TFC church  
1030 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

1031 processes. Each church should inform its members of the appeal processes for  
1032 adjudications.<sup>77</sup>

1033 8.4.2 Ordained elders are to oversee church discipline. Only ordained elders are to  
1034 adjudicate in church discipline cases. In cases where there are not enough  
1035 elders present locally to comprise an adjudicatory panel, the Region will  
1036 supply the needed ordained elders.

1037 8.4.3 The steps outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 should be followed carefully and  
1038 privacy protected for all involved. The initial steps are private, informal, and  
1039 gradual. The discipline moves forward in the steps and becomes formal if the  
1040 elders uphold the veracity of the charge(s), and the person continues to be  
1041 unrepentant. The steps of church discipline should be as follows:

1042 8.4.3.1 **First step:** “Go tell him his fault, between you and him alone” (Matt.  
1043 18:15). If a church member confesses to or is caught in serious sin or  
1044 commits a sin against another believer, the person sinned against or  
1045 who is witness to or has evidence of their brother's sin(s), in most  
1046 cases, approaches the brother in private, bringing their evidence and  
1047 appeals to repentance.

1048 8.4.3.2 **Second step:** “If he doesn't listen, take one or two others along with  
1049 you” (v. 16). If the attempt to privately exhort the accused brother is  
1050 met with a refusal to listen (i.e., unrepentant refusal to comply with  
1051 concerns), then the person who was sinned against or who witnessed  
1052 sin(s) or has evidence of the brother's sin involves other church  
1053 members (one or more), including the local church elders. If the  
1054 elders uphold the veracity of the charge(s) and the person continues to  
1055 be unrepentant, this process transitions from informal to formal  
1056 church discipline. This step results in the widening of the circle of  
1057 people involved to bring appropriate credibility to the concerns and  
1058 additional loving appeals to the brother caught in sin. At times, this  
1059 step will result in reconciliation due to repentance or due to the  
1060 correcting of the misjudgment of the accusing party, as the “one or  
1061 two others” involved bring increased objectivity.

1062 8.4.3.3 **Third step:** “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church” (v.  
1063 17a). Should the unrepentant brother refuse to comply with the  
1064 concerns and calls to repentance from the widening circle of church  
1065 members involved in seeking to help restore him, then the broader  
1066 church gets involved in a meaningful way to provide further  
1067 objectivity and aid to the concerns of the persons' involved in seeking  
1068 the accused brother's restoration. This third step will be some variant

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<sup>77</sup> See RRDA 5.1.3

1069 of a final call to the unrepentant brother from the church under the  
1070 directive of elders.

1071 8.4.3.4 **Final step:** “If he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to  
1072 you as a Gentile and a tax collector” (v. 17b). The final step, known  
1073 as “excommunication,” occurs when the person who has been proven  
1074 as unrepentant through the first three steps of church discipline is now  
1075 removed from the church and is no longer a member in good standing.  
1076 That individual is to be treated as a non-Christian, as their behavior  
1077 and their profession are inconsistent – they are bearing bad fruit like  
1078 an unbeliever. Therefore, the church will relate differently to the  
1079 excommunicated person, no longer offering them the Christian  
1080 fellowship that being members together once held before the church  
1081 discipline process was necessary.

1082 8.4.4 At every point during church discipline, the goal is one of merciful reclamation  
1083 and repentance.<sup>78</sup> This goal should be demonstrated at all points through the  
1084 tone and content of communication. Even if ending with excommunication, the  
1085 process of discipline should always leave room for future repentance and  
1086 restoration. It is the duty of elderships to decide when to readmit the penitent to  
1087 the fellowship of the church.<sup>79</sup> It is the duty of congregants to forgive, comfort,  
1088 and reaffirm their love for such a one.<sup>80</sup>

1089 8.4.5 If an eldership refuses to hear charges of a doctrinal or publicly scandalous  
1090 nature and two other elderships file charges with the TFC Judicial Review  
1091 Committee, the JRC shall commence an investigation that may lead to  
1092 adjudications.

1093 8.4.6 Appeals to judgments rendered in church discipline hearings may be appealed  
1094 to the TFC JRC and the Court of Appeals along the established channels  
1095 provided in section 42 of the *RRDA*.

## 1096 **8.5 Discipline of Elders**

### 1097 8.5.1 Due Process

1098 At times there will be accusations made towards an elder within TFC, or an  
1099 elder may be caught in sin or confesses to a serious moral failure. It is at these  
1100 times that a particular process should be enacted that is commensurate to the  
1101 office they fill. Scripture commands that we treat elders in particular ways  
1102 under these conditions. For any accusation brought to an eldership concerning  
1103 one or more of their elders, care must be taken in processing the credibility of  
1104 witnesses/evidence in obedience to 1 Tim. 5:19, which states, “Do not admit a  
1105 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

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1106 Local elders are to decide whether evidence or witness testimonies are  
1107 credible, as it is only through the governing officers of the church that  
1108 accusations are evaluated and determined as admissible. If there are no other  
1109 corroborating witnesses or clear pieces of evidence provided, the accusations  
1110 may be dismissed.

1111 Should an elder confess to serious sin or even be accused of such sins, either  
1112 the accused elder or the other local elders shall immediately contact their  
1113 Regional Leader and the Chairman of the Judicial Review Committee for the  
1114 purpose of seeking counsel and possible aid in complying with the RRDA in  
1115 the adjudication process.

1116 The care taken in processing any accusations against an elder is both to protect  
1117 the church against wayward elders and to protect elders against wayward  
1118 church members. A proper due process will balance both of these concerns and  
1119 will require that:

1120 8.5.1.1 Accusations must be made within two years of the offense(s).  
1121 Notwithstanding this requirement, any allegation involving sexual  
1122 misconduct or illegal activity may be brought without timeframe  
1123 limitation.

1124 8.5.1.2 The accused elder has the right to face his accuser(s) unless the  
1125 charge stems from a minor.

1126 8.5.2 Grounds for Discipline of an Elder

1127 The grounds of the accusation must be upon a documented and serious breach  
1128 of sound doctrine (as outlined in the *Trinity Confession of Faith*) or an offense  
1129 that would disqualify an elder from their office.<sup>81</sup> See RRDA 6.5.4 for the  
1130 outline of admissible charges.

1131 8.5.3 Results of adjudications

1132 Results will be one of the following: Cleared of charges, private rebuke, public  
1133 rebuke, removal from office, church discipline, all as further outlined in the  
1134 *RRDA*.

1135 8.5.4 Suspension of Elders

1136 Should an elder be accused of serious criminal or scandalous sin, the remaining  
1137 elders may, at their own discretion, temporarily suspend the accused elder from  
1138 his office and its duties with or without pay until an adjudicatory panel rules on  
1139 the matter. In a case where the eldership decides to suspend pay, if the elder is  
1140 ultimately cleared of the charges, he must receive his withheld pay in full. Two  
1141 unaccused elders are required to approve this action. If there are not two  
1142 remaining unaccused elders, the JRC will supply the necessary elders for the

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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

1143 adjudicatory panel. In the situation where there is only one elder, and he is the  
1144 accused, the Region will assume responsibility for the care of the church. The  
1145 Regional Leader will coordinate that care. The financial assets of the church  
1146 remain under the control of the local church officers or their delegates.

1147 8.5.4.1 Charges against an Eldership

1148 Should the actions or decisions of an entire eldership create grounds  
1149 for an admissible charge (BCO 8.5.2), the charge may be brought by  
1150 an individual, individual elder, or another eldership as outlined in  
1151 RRDA 6 & 7. Additionally, persistent failure to uphold the  
1152 requirements of the TFC BCO or the TFC Partnership Agreement is  
1153 also a ground for charges against an eldership.

1154 Should an entire eldership be removed and their local church  
1155 members desire to remain in partnership with TFC, they should  
1156 consult the Chairman of the Church Partnerships Committee  
1157 (information found at info@TrinityFellowshipChurches.com).

1158 **8.6 Judicial Review Committees**

1159 8.6.1 Appointment of the Judicial Review Committee

1160 The Regional Assembly will install a *minimum* of five elders to the Judicial  
1161 Review Committee.<sup>82</sup> The JRC will provide the necessary adjudicatory body  
1162 for all appeals and adjudications that rise beyond the scope of a local eldership  
1163 and will provide counsel to local elderships in their own adjudications.

1164 Members of the Judicial Review Committee will serve six-year terms with no  
1165 term limits. If an elder resigns before his term is up, the Region nominates,  
1166 votes, and then appoints a replacement for the duration of the term, pending  
1167 confirmation from the RA by simple majority vote.

1168 The JRC will be maintained as a minimum of five elders in a Region,  
1169 preferably from different churches, with each case heard by three members of  
1170 the committee. Men are assigned to a case through a blind draw. An elder may  
1171 be exempted from inclusion in a case for various reasons, from time constraints  
1172 to conflicts of interest. If necessary, JRC members may be shared between  
1173 regions serving on adjudication panels if approved by both regions.

1174 8.6.2 Powers and Responsibilities of the Judicial Review Committee

1175 8.6.2.1 The Judicial Review Committee should serve as a resource for  
1176 informal counsel to elderships walking through a 1 Timothy 5:19-21

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<sup>82</sup> See BCO 4.2.5

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- 1177 proceeding at the local level. This is to ensure that the procedural  
1178 elements of discipline are followed.
- 1179 8.6.2.2 A local eldership should not publicly rebuke or remove an elder  
1180 without the involvement of the Judicial Review Committee.
- 1181 8.6.2.3 In these instances, the JRC is not weighing in on the guilt or  
1182 innocence of the elder but assisting in ensuring that a fair and just  
1183 process has been carried out according to the procedures spelled out  
1184 in the RRDA.
- 1185 8.6.2.4 The Judicial Review Committee will also serve as a body of appeal  
1186 for church members who have been disciplined or removed from  
1187 membership. The JRC must hear the appeal of any excommunicated  
1188 member if it is made within the allotted time frame through the  
1189 appropriate channels (See RRDA 42).
- 1190 8.6.2.5 If a charge is brought against an elder but is not admitted by the  
1191 Moderator, the person bringing the charge may appeal to the Judicial  
1192 Review Committee. The JRC will determine whether or not the case  
1193 shall be heard by the local Panel.
- 1194 8.6.2.6 The Judicial Review Committee will be a place of appeal for any  
1195 elder who is removed by a local Panel. The JRC must hear the appeal  
1196 of any trial decision regarding an elder at the local level (if the appeal  
1197 is made within the allotted time frame). This result will be a binding  
1198 decision in which the elder in question is cleared of charges, privately  
1199 or publicly rebuked, or removed from office.<sup>83</sup>
- 1200 8.6.2.7 The Judicial Review Committee will serve as the original adjudicating  
1201 body for the trial of an accused elder in the case where a local  
1202 eldership is too small to adequately deal with the matter. In such a  
1203 case, the TFC Court of Appeals would handle any further appeal.
- 1204 8.6.2.8 A local panel has the recourse of appeal to the TFC Court of Appeals  
1205 should they disagree with any judgment by the JRC that overturns  
1206 their prior verdict. However, the decision of the JRC should be  
1207 enacted, even while the appeals process continues.
- 1208 8.6.2.9 When the JRC has the original jurisdiction in the case of an accused  
1209 elder when the local eldership is too small to adequately deal with the  
1210 matter, once their Panel renders a decision, the execution of that  
1211 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.

1212 elder(s). Should there be no unaccused elders, the execution of the  
1213 decision shall be the exclusive responsibility of the JRC.

1214 8.6.2.10 Charges Against Denominational Leaders and Committee Members

1215 8.6.2.10.1 Charges against denominational leaders that generally  
1216 pertain to their qualification as elders will be handled  
1217 according to the usual chain of jurisdiction for an elder:  
1218 local Panel, Judicial Review Committee, TFC Court of  
1219 Appeals.

1220 8.6.2.10.2 Each committee will have specific agreed-upon  
1221 responsibilities, policies, and procedures, including the  
1222 circumstances that are appropriate to the removal of an  
1223 elder from a committee (BCO 4.4.3 et al.)

1224 8.6.2.11 Removal of a Church from TFC due to BCO noncompliance

1225 Any church that willfully, demonstrably, and consistently fails to  
1226 comply with the explicit mandates of the BCO over the period of two  
1227 or more years may be removed from the partnership per the decision  
1228 of the JRC following the trial procedures outlined in the RRDA.

1229 **8.7 The Court of Appeals**

1230 8.7.1 Candidates for the TFC Court of Appeals are drawn from the members of the  
1231 Regional Judicial Review Committees. They shall be nominated by any three  
1232 GA members. Nominations shall be submitted to GA members at least 30 days  
1233 before meeting. They shall be elected by popular vote according to BCO 3.2.  
1234 Members of the TFC Court of Appeal are Appellate Elders. These Appellate  
1235 Elders will be appointed to six-year terms, with no term limits.

1236 8.7.2 The number of Jurists will correspond to the number of Regions. The  
1237 minimum number of jurists shall be 5. If there are not enough regions,  
1238 additional jurists may be drawn from any region to make up the minimum. The  
1239 General Assembly may appoint additional jurists to serve on the Court of  
1240 Appeals on an ad-hoc basis by special meeting with at least a 15-day notice.  
1241 Such jurists need only serve for the current adjudicatory issue. Any two GA  
1242 delegates may call for such a special meeting in this case. Voting for ad-hoc  
1243 Appellate Elders may be done electronically and remotely.

1244 8.7.3 When a case is appealed, three Jurists will be assigned to determine whether  
1245 they will hear the case.

1246 8.7.4 When an appeal is heard by the TFC Court of Appeals, the Appellate Elders  
1247 from the Region in which the charge originated will recuse themselves in order  
1248 to prevent conflict of interest. Should there be insufficient Appellate Elders,  
1249 Appellate Elders from the respective Region may serve if they did not

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- 1250 previously serve as elders in the particular case. Additionally, Appellate Elders  
1251 appointed per BCO 8.7.3 may serve.
- 1252 8.7.5 A blind draw will be used to assign three Jurists to a case.
- 1253 8.7.6 Responsibilities of the TFC Court of Appeals
- 1254 8.7.6.1 The Court of Appeals shall conduct all adjudications according to the  
1255 RRDA.
- 1256 8.7.6.2 The TFC Court of Appeals has the right to review or not review any  
1257 appeal of a case that has previously been decided by a Regional  
1258 Judicial Review Committee. Any decision of a Regional Judicial  
1259 Review Committee may be appealed up to the TFC Court of Appeals  
1260 by either party to the decision, by an eldership, or by a Panel whose  
1261 judgment has been overruled.
- 1262 8.7.6.3 In any case where the Regional Judicial Review Committee has  
1263 assumed original jurisdiction for a local church case and conducted a  
1264 trial, the TFC Court of Appeals must hear the case if it is appealed.  
1265 The TFC Court of Appeals may not decline to hear such a case.
- 1266 8.7.6.4 The Court has the right to uphold or overturn the decision of a  
1267 regional court and is not bound to grant another trial.
- 1268 8.7.6.5 Censure or Removal of a Region from TFC
- 1269 8.7.6.5.1 Circumstances requiring the censure or removal of a  
1270 Region include:
- 1271 8.7.6.5.1.1 *Persistent deviation from the TFC Statement of Faith*
- 1272 8.7.6.5.1.2 *Persistent divisive behavior (e.g., making or condoning*  
1273 *charges against TFC members outside of the appropriate*  
1274 *judicatories)*
- 1275 8.7.6.5.1.3 *Unrepentant sin on the part of the elders*
- 1276 8.7.6.5.1.4 *Persistent failure to uphold the TFC BCO or the TFC*  
1277 *Partnership Agreement*
- 1278 8.7.6.5.2 Charges against a region must be brought by the lesser of  
1279 either ten members or twenty-five percent of the General  
1280 Assembly. Elders and elderships within a Region which  
1281 register their dissent against the position or action of the  
1282 Region will be exempted from censure or removal.
- 1283 8.7.6.5.3 If the TFC Court of Appeals decides to hear charges  
1284 brought against a region, then after any necessary recusals,  
1285 a blind draw will be used to assign five elders to the case. If  
1286 less than five Jurists remain after recusals, then all of them  
1287 shall try the case.

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- 1288 8.7.6.5.4 The TFC Court of Appeals will render one of the following  
1289 judgments: Not Guilty or Censure or Removal.
- 1290 8.7.6.5.5 If the judgment is for censure, the General Assembly will  
1291 finalize or overturn the decision by a simple majority vote.
- 1292 8.7.6.5.6 If the judgment is for removal, a two-thirds majority vote  
1293 by the General Assembly will finalize the decision of the  
1294 TFC Court of Appeals.
- 1295 8.7.6.5.7 If the judgment of the TFC Court of Appeals is not upheld  
1296 by a two-thirds majority, it will immediately initiate a  
1297 simple majority vote by the General Assembly on whether  
1298 to censure the Region.