

## ***Covenant for Faculty Members***

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We, [the undersigned], believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the inspired Word of God, which proclaims the good news of God's creation and redemption through Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the authority of God's Word, we submit to it in all matters of life and faith.

We affirm three creeds—the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed*—as ecumenical expressions of the Christian faith. In doing so, we confess our faith in unity with followers of Jesus Christ throughout all ages and among all nations.

We also affirm three confessions—the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and the *Canons of Dort*—as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith, whose doctrines fully agree with the Word of God. These confessions continue to define the way we understand Scripture, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.

Grateful for these expressions of faith, we promise to be formed and governed by them. We heartily believe and will promote and defend their doctrines faithfully, conforming our preaching, teaching, writing, serving, and living to them.

Along with these historic creeds and confessions, we also recognize the witness of *Our World Belongs to God: A Contemporary Testimony* as a current Reformed expression of the Christian faith that forms and guides us in our present context.

We also promise to present or receive confessional difficulties in a spirit of love and fellowship with our brothers and sisters as together we seek a fuller understanding of the gospel. Should we come to believe that a teaching in the confessional documents is not the teaching of God's Word, we will communicate our views to the Board of Trustees, according to the procedures prescribed by the *Handbook for Teaching Faculty*. If the board asks, we will give a full explanation of our views. Further, we promise to submit to the board's judgment and authority.

We honor this covenant for the well-being of the church to the glory of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## Commentary on the *Covenant for Faculty Members*

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This *Covenant for Faculty Members* is based on the *Covenant for Officebearers* in the Christian Reformed Church adopted by Synod in 2012,<sup>1</sup> but clearly spells out that the university's Board of Trustees, rather than a faculty member's church council, is the body charged with confessional oversight for teaching, scholarly activities, and other university-related work.

Faculty members who are also church officebearers sign a slightly different covenant with respect to their service as officebearers which names the church council as the oversight body. In this situation, the faculty member serves under the authority of two complementary oversight bodies: the university's Board of Trustees provides oversight for the teaching, scholarly activities and other university-related work of the faculty member; the congregation's council provides oversight for service related to the life of the local congregation. At the same time, the university recognizes that while these functions may be distinguished, they are also difficult to separate. For this reason, the Board of Trustees requests that when a faculty member who is also an officebearer has "a difficulty with these doctrines or reaches views differing from them," that this concern be disclosed both to the church council and to the Board of Trustees. The board commits to work with the church council to maintain the authority that is appropriate to each body.

For the work of the university, the meaning of affirming the confessions shall be determined according to the church order of the Christian Reformed Church (e.g., *Church Order*, Article 5, and its supplements), which currently reads:<sup>2</sup>

The person signing the *Covenant for Faculty Members* affirms without reservation all the doctrines contained in the standards of the church as being doctrines that are taught in the Word of God.

The signatory does not by affirming the confessions declare that these doctrines are all stated in the best possible manner, or that the standards of our church cover all that the Scriptures teach on the matters confessed. Nor does the signatory declare that every teaching of the Scriptures is set forth in our confessions, or that every heresy is rejected and refuted by them.

A signatory is bound only to those doctrines that are confessed, and is not bound to the references, allusions, and remarks that are incidental to the formulation of these doctrines, nor to the theological deductions that some may draw from the doctrines set forth in the confessions. However, no one is free to decide for oneself or for the church what is and what is not a doctrine confessed in the standards. In the event that such a question should arise, the decision of the assemblies of the church shall be sought and acquiesced in.

The confessions are documents that belong to the church. For the ongoing life and work of the CRC and its agencies and educational institutions, the authority to make binding judgments about the meaning and implications of the confessions is assigned to synod. Under the authority of synod, the church assigns authority for the life of the university to the Board of Trustees. The Board of

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.crcna.org/resources/church-resources/liturgical-forms-resources/ordination-installation/covenant-officebearers>.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from *Church Order and Its Supplements 2013* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Reformed Church in North America, 2013), pp. 14–15, <http://www.crcna.org/sites/default/files/churchorder.pdf>.

Trustees, in turn, assigns authority within the university's governance system, in which decisions about personnel and confessional interpretation are assigned to the Professional Status Committee (PSC).

When the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church has issued a formal interpretation of the confessions, that interpretation shall be binding for Calvin University. When a disagreement about confessional interpretation arises, PSC may, after reviewing prior synodical action on the topic and in consultation with experts in confessional interpretation, theology and church polity, recommend to the Board of Trustees (a) that the board issue a judgment about the meaning and implications of the confessions for the work of the university on the topic in question, and (b) what that judgment should be. PSC shall seek to make a recommendation that is consistent with the Christian Reformed Church's approach to affirming the confessions in general and to the issue at hand. Any judgment of the Board of Trustees is in turn subject to the judgment of the synod of the Christian Reformed Church.

*This material is quoted from §3.6.1.1 of the Handbook for Teaching Faculty, rev. December 2013*