

CONSTITUTION

AND

BY-LAWS

OF

THE HUNGARIAN REFORMED CHURCH

IN AMERICA

Official Publication

1998

NAME

1. The name of the church is The Hungarian Reformed Church in America.

PREAMBLE

2. The Hungarian Reformed Church in America declares itself before God and man to be a confessional, historical Reformed Christian Church, a part of the one holy, catholic church of the Lord Jesus Christ and the American offspring of the Reformed Church in Hungary. It recognizes the Lord Jesus Christ alone as its sole head, according to the Holy Scriptures and in accordance with the basic standards of the church; namely, the Second Helvetic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. It is a self-supporting church depending on the Christian stewardship of its members.

MEMBERSHIP

3. The Hungarian Reformed Church in America embraces all Hungarian Reformed congregations on the American Continents which accept this Constitution and are admitted into the Church.

ORGANIZATION

4. The organizations of The Hungarian Reformed Church in America are the congregations, the classis, and the Synod.

CONGREGATIONS

5. Types of Congregations:
 - a. Regular: Congregations which maintain and support a place of worship and have a resident pastor and a church council.
 - b. Associate: Congregations which are located in separate communities and have their individual church councils but jointly have one pastor.
 - c. Mission: Congregations composed of members of one or several municipalities which are not fully self-supporting but are supported in part by the General Fund of the Synod or by the classis and have a church council. Such congregations may be served by a stated or supply minister.

6. Authority and Duties:

- a. Authority to organize.

Associated congregations may organize themselves into regular congregations. In the event there is mutually owned real estate with another congregation, distribution of such property shall be by agreement between the congregations. The lack of an agreement shall be decided by the Judicial Commission of the respective Classis. Its rulings may be appealed to the Judicial Commission of the Synod.

- b. Authority to dissolve.

Any congregation may dissolve by a vote of $\frac{3}{4}$ of all voting members of the congregation. This action must be approved by the General Assembly of the Synod. Upon dissolution all property of the congregation, real and personal, shall become a part of the General Fund of the Synod.

- c. Authority to withdraw from the Synod.

Any congregation may withdraw from the Synod by a vote of 90% of all voting members of the congregation. This action is subject to review and confirmation of the General Assembly of the Synod.

- d. To elect a pastor.
- e. To care for the spiritual needs of its members.
- f. To provide religious instruction to the children of its members.
- g. To care for the poor
- h. To adopt rules and regulations consistent with the Constitution and By-Laws of the Hungarian Reformed Church in America. Such rules and regulations are subject to review and confirmation of the Assembly of the Classis.
- i. To enforce compliance with the Constitution and By-Laws of the Hungarian Reformed Church in America.
- j. To administer the assets of the congregation.
- k. To buy, sell or mortgage real property.
- l. To construct churches, schools and parsonages.
- m. To collect dues and assessments for congregational purposes, contributions for administrative expenses of the classis and the Synod, and donations to the Mission Fund of The Hungarian Reformed Church in America, and maintain records thereof.
- n. To regulate the use of church cemeteries.
- o. To vote for such officers and members of classis and synod organizations as provided for in this Constitution and By-Laws. Congregations shall have the right to vote only if their assessments have been fully paid to the general fund of the synod and to their respective classes
- p. To insure that all functions of the congregation, such as divine service, baptism, Lord's Supper, confirmation, marriage, funeral, etc., are conducted in accordance with law, both civil and church.
- q. To insure that the place of worship shall be used only for church functions.

- r. To accept endowments.
- s. To exercise all such rights and responsibilities as have not been delegated by this Constitution and By-Laws to the Pastor or the officers or organizations of the classis or Synod.

7. Membership:

- a. All people who accept the tenets of faith of The Hungarian Reformed Church in America shall be members of that congregation in which they are received by the Pastor either by an affirmation of faith or letter of transfer from another congregation of the Reformed-Presbyterian family of churches.
- b. Lutherans may be accepted as regular members.

8. Rights of Members:

- a. To vote for and be elected to offices hereinafter set forth.
- b. To be entitled to participate in and receive all the services of the church such as divine service, baptism, marriage, funeral, etc.
- c. To send their children to church schools.
- d. To file appeals with the Judicial Commissions of the classis and Synod.

9. Duties and Obligations:

- a. To lead an upright, clean, moderate and sober life, according to the spirit and teachings of the Gospel.
- b. To partake in divine services.
- c. To partake of the Lord's Supper regularly.
- d. To observe Sundays and other religious holidays.
- e. To report to the Pastor in advance intentions of marriage.
- f. The church recognizes the validity of all inter-Christian marriages solemnized before any duly authorized Christian minister. In the event a member contemplates an inter-Christian marriage, he should consult and counsel with the Pastor before such marriage. Said member shall be encouraged to have said marriage solemnized in a Hungarian Reformed Church by a Hungarian Reformed minister, to have children, born of said

marriage, baptized, nurtured and confirmed in The Hungarian Reformed Church in America.

- g. To have their children baptized as soon after birth as possible, during a worship service and in the presence of parents and godparents.
- h. To support the church generously, its ministries and its activities, with time, talent and money. The annual congregational meeting shall determine the minimum amount assessed as annual dues for each member. Special appeals for funds shall be determined by the Pastor with the approval of the Church Council.

10. Meetings of the Congregations:

- a. The Annual Meeting of the congregation shall be held at least once a year. The Meeting should be held in the House of God. Written notice of such regular meetings shall be forwarded to each member of the congregation at least 14 days prior to said meeting and shall be published in the church at least one Sunday prior to said meetings. The agenda shall be approved by majority vote of the Church Council.
- b. Special meetings of the congregation may be convened by majority vote of the Church Council with notification to the Dean of the appropriate classis; by a petition signed by the majority of the members of the congregation with notification to the Dean; or by the Dean. The written notice of the time, date and agenda of said meeting shall be mailed to each member of the congregation at least fifteen (15) days prior to said meeting.
- c. A congregational meeting shall be duly constituted at the time and place published regardless of the number of members present.
- d. Members entitled to vote shall consist of communicant members, 18 years of age or over, who actively support the Church. Any items that would require a vote may be voted upon by secret ballot if at least 10 voting members request a secret ballot. A list of such voting members shall be prepared by the Pastor and the Church Council once a year and submitted to the Dean of the classis in writing at least two (2) weeks prior to the regular congregational meeting. Said list shall be available for public inspection upon request. New members may be added to said list by the Pastor and the Church Council after said member is received into church membership. The church council has the right to remove the name of a member from the voting list if the acts or the deportment of a member disturbs the tranquility of the congregation.

- e. The chairman of the congregational meeting shall be the pastor. The co-chairman shall be the Chief Elder. No congregational meeting shall be held without the presence of a minister.
- f. At the conclusion of a congregational meeting, the Secretary of the congregation shall forthwith communicate, in writing, with the Dean of the classis on decisions of said congregational meeting. Should the Dean take exception to any action of the congregational meeting, same shall be communicated to the congregation within fifteen (15) days from the date of receipt by the Dean of the communication from the Secretary. Upon receipt of communication regarding exception, the congregation shall hold a special meeting within thirty (30) days thereof to consider the exception by the Dean.

Should such special meeting not be called within time, the decision of the Dean shall be binding. If such special meeting is called and the exception of the Dean is questioned, the Dean shall within thirty (30) days from date of receipt of the decision of the congregation in writing, call a meeting of the Assembly of the Classis for purpose of making a decision.

11. Authority of congregational meeting:

- a. To extend the call to a pastor and determine the terms thereof.
- b. To determine the salaries of the pastor and church employees.
- c. To elect members of Church Council. The number of elected members shall be determined by each congregation at the congregational meeting, subject to the approval of the Assembly of the Classis.
- d. To purchase, sell, mortgage real estate.
- e. To authorize expenditures or indebtedness over a minimum of \$10,000.00.
- f. To determine church and /or school assessments.
- g. To terminate the pastoral relationship due to irreconcilable differences between Pastor and congregation.
- h. To adopt rules and regulations, not inconsistent with these By-Laws; they shall be subject to review and confirmation of the Assembly of the Classis.

THE CHURCH COUNCIL

12. The Church Council shall exercise all rights of the congregation which have not been delegated under this Constitution and By-Laws to the Congregational Meeting, Judicial Commission of the congregation or elected officials. All organizations such as, Men's Club, Women's Guild, Youth Fellowship ... etc. that are established within the Church would fall under the direct control of the Church Council.

13. The members of the Church Council are:

- a. The Pastor, or in the event of the absence of the Pastor or a vacancy in the office of the Pastor, a minister appointed by the Dean of the Classis
- b. Elected members.
- c. Elected officers of the congregation.

14. All communicant members of the congregation in good standing for two consecutive years shall be eligible for election to the Church Council. Each Church Council shall have a minimum of four elected members.

15. Each elected member of the Church Council shall be elected for a term of three years. The terms of one-third of the elected members shall expire annually.

16. All newly elected members of the Church Council shall be sworn in as soon as possible after the election.

17. Alternate members of the Church Council may be elected at the congregational meeting to serve in the absence of the Council members, or to complete, in the event of vacancy, the unexpired term.

18. The Church Council, acting as a nominating committee, shall present a slate of candidates for election to the congregation. Nominations may be made from the floor at the congregational meeting.

19. Election of Church Council members shall be by a simple majority of the votes cast.

20. The election of any officer or Church Council member may be appealed to the Dean of the Classis if at least 20% /twenty percent/ of the voting members disagree with such selection and the appeal is made within fifteen days from the date of said election. The Dean shall review the action of the congregational meeting and shall communicate his decision to the congregation within ten /10/ days of receipt of the appeal. The decision of the Dean shall be final unless appealed within fifteen (15) days of the receipt of same by said congregation.

21. The duties of the members of the Church Council are:

- a. To attend the meetings of the Council and to partake in its deliberations.
- b. To partake in designated committee activities.
- c. To support the Pastor in his endeavors for the benefit of the congregation and the church.
- d. To set an example to members of the congregation, by their devotion to the church, regular attendance at church services and receipt of sacraments of the church.

22. The chairman of the Church Council meetings shall be the Pastor;

The Chief Elder shall be co-chairman. No meeting, except as hereinafter provided may be held without the presence of a minister. In the event of vacancy in the office of the pastor, a meeting of the Church Council may be held, but only with the expressed consent of the Dean. Such meetings shall be called only for the purpose of disposing of urgent matters. The chairman of such meetings shall be the Chief Elder. A copy of the minutes of said meeting shall be forwarded to the Dean forthwith.

23. The official representatives of the congregation shall be the Pastor and the Chief Elder.

24. The Church Council shall hold at least ten meetings per year.

25. Special meetings of the Church Council may be called upon request of the pastor, or a majority of the Council members, or by the Dean.

26. Notice of special or regular meetings shall be given to each Council member no less than 48 hours preceding said meeting.

27. Meetings of the Church Council shall be open to members of the congregation unless one of the chairmen or one-third of the members present desire a closed session.

28. No meeting of the Church Council shall be duly constituted unless a quorum of the members shall be present. A quorum shall consist of one-third of the members, but in no event less than two members.

29. All motions made at the meeting of the Church Council shall require for passage a majority of the votes cast.

30. Complete and accurate minutes of all meetings of the Church Council shall be taken by the Secretary of the congregation. Upon approval at the next regular meeting of the Council, said minutes shall be attested to by the Pastor and Chief Elder.

31. A Church Council may be dissolved only by action of the Judicial Commission of the Classis. Proceedings for the dissolution of a Church Council shall be instituted either by a written complaint to the Dean by a member of the congregation or upon the initiative of the Dean. Should the Judicial Commission of the Classis order the dissolution of a Church Council and no appeal from said order is taken within the prescribed time the Judicial Commission shall order a special meeting of the church congregation for the purpose of electing new members of the Church Council. Should the decision of the Classis Judicial Commission be appealed and sustained, such election shall be ordered by the Judicial Commission of the Synod.

OFFICERS OF THE CONGREGATION

32. The officers of a congregation shall be the pastor, by virtue of his office the chief elder, vice chief elder(s), secretary, treasurer and controller. Said officers shall perform all duties normally associated with their respective offices and lawful order of higher church authorities and of the Church Council.

PASTOR

33. A pastor shall be a minister accepted and approved by the Synod's Ministerial Qualifying Committee. Pastors shall be classified as:

- a. Regular Pastor – a minister who is called and elected by the congregation; his term shall be for life unless removed from office for cause;
- b. Assistant Pastor – a minister employed by the Church Council to assist the services of the regular pastor;
- c. Associate Pastor - elected by the Congregation to assist the Regular or senior Pastor in his ministry
- d. Stated or Supply /interim/ Pastor – his service may be contracted by the congregation for a limited period of time at the time of vacancy until the election of a regular pastor; the contract must be approved by the Dean and it may be renewed. A Stated or Supply Pastor may also be appointed by the Dean to serve a mission church.

e. At-Large Pastor – a minister appointed by the Bishop to perform missionary work in an area designated by the Bishop.

34. The regular pastors, associate pastors and at-large pastors are to be installed by the Dean of the respective Classis.

35. Pastors shall perform their official functions only in their respective congregations. They may officiate in other congregations only upon official appointment by the Dean or Bishop, or upon specific request of the Pastor of said congregation.

36. The Bishop may give temporary authorization to an unordained seminary student to preach the gospel and to administer the sacraments.

37. Laymen may, with the consent of the Pastor, participate in the conduct of worship services.

38. The duties and obligations of a pastor shall be:

- a. To preach the Word of God in accordance with the standards of the Church
- b. To preside at and conduct the worship services; administer the sacraments; and conduct the rites of the Church.
- c. To supervise the religious education of the youth of the Church.
- d. To minister to the spiritual needs of the members of the congregation.
- e. To supervise the financial and administrative matters of the congregation.
- f. To keep the official registers of vital statistics of the congregation and to provide excerpts thereof upon request.
- g. To reside in the residence designated in his call.
- h. To provide for a substitute to serve the congregation in his absence and to notify the Dean of the respective Classis in the event of a contemplated absence for more than two consecutive Sundays.
- i. To comply with all directives of higher Church authorities which are not in conflict with the Constitution and By-Laws.

j. To conduct his life pursuant to the provisions of his official oath.

CHIEF ELDER AND ASSISTANT CHIEF ELDER(S)

39. A chief elder and one or more assistant chief elders shall be elected by the congregations at the annual meeting from among members of said congregation in good standing. The term of office shall be for a maximum of three years. They can be re-elected. They shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath before the congregation. In case of death or incapacity of the chief elder, an assistant chief elder shall assume his duties

40. The duty of the chief elder shall be to supervise the temporal affairs of the congregation.

41. The chief elder and assistant chief elder(s) shall be bonded.

SECRETARY

42. A secretary shall be elected from among the members in good standing at the annual meeting of the congregation. The term of office shall be for a maximum of three years. He can be reelected. The secretary shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath. He shall take minutes of the meetings of the congregation and of the Church Council.

TREASURER

43. The treasurer of the congregation shall be elected at the annual meeting of the congregation from among its members in good standing. The term of office shall be for a maximum of three years. He can be reelected. He shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath. He shall handle monies of the congregation under the supervision of the pastor and the chief elder. The Treasurer shall be bonded.

CONTROLLER

44. The Controller of the congregation shall be elected at the annual meeting of the congregation from among its of office shall be for a maximum of three years. He can be re-elected. The controller shall assume office upon election or upon the administering the official oath. He shall audit the book of the Treasurer on a monthly basis.

CERTIFICATES OF SERVICE

45. Certificates of Service for regular, associate and supply pastors shall be issued by the Dean of the respective Classis; for at-large pastors by the Bishop. Should the pastor be dissatisfied with the contents of said certificate, he may

appeal to the Judicial Commission of the issuing authority. The decision of the Judicial Commission, which shall be, rendered within six weeks from the date of appeal, shall be noted on the certificate by the Dean.

46. Certificates of Service for assistant pastors shall be issued by the regular pastor of the congregation and shall be countersigned by the Dean. Should said pastor be dissatisfied with the contents of said certificate, he may appeal to the Dean. Should the Dean sustain the appeal, said action shall be noted on the certificate. Should the Dean reject the appeal, the assistant pastor may request a new certificate of service after the expiration of three months from the date of rejection of his appeal.

ELECTION OF PASTORS

47. A pastor shall be elected from among ministers examined and qualified by the ministerial qualifying committee elected by the General Assembly of the Synod.

48. The office of pastor shall be deemed vacant upon:

- a. Resignation, which resignation shall be approved by the Dean.
- b. Retirement.
- c. Removal as a result of disciplinary proceedings.
- d. Termination of pastoral relationship due to irreconcilable differences between Pastor and congregation as determined by a between Pastor and congregation as determined by a three-fourths (3/4) vote of the members present at a special meeting of the congregation, provided that 2/3 of members entitled to vote are present at said meeting
- e. Death

49. The vacancy in the office of the Pastor shall be forthwith reported to the Dean of the Classis. The Dean, or his designated representative, shall, within eight days of receipt of said notice, visit said congregation and shall:

- a. Take inventory of all personal and real property of the congregation.
- b. Take all necessary action to care for and safeguard said assets.

- c. Order the payment of arrearages, if any, of the pastor's salary.
- d. Arrange for widows and orphans benefits.
- e. Make provisions for a temporary supply pastor.

50. A vacancy in the office of the Pastor shall be filled as follows:

- a. The Church Council shall appoint a pulpit committee consisting of members of the Church Council and representatives of Church organizations.
- b. The pulpit committee shall interview potential candidates, gather pertinent data concerning them and ascertain their willingness to accept a call.
- c. The Church Council, upon recommendation of the pulpit committee, shall determine who should be presented as candidates.
- d. The names of said candidates shall be submitted to the Dean of the Classis for verification of their qualifications.
- e. Upon request of the Dean, the candidates shall submit to him their resumes within fifteen (15) days.
- f. Certification of qualifications shall be forwarded by the Dean to the Church Council eight (8) days thereafter.
- g. Those candidates who have been certified by the Dean as, qualified shall be invited by the pulpit committee to preach at the church.
- h. The pulpit committee shall recommend to the Church Council one of the candidates and the terms of the call.
- i. A congregational meeting shall be convened at which the Dean or his delegate shall preside.
- j. The Church Council shall recommend to the congregation one of the candidates, and the terms of the call.
- k. A candidate shall be elected by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the qualified members of the congregation present at said meeting.
- l. The voting shall be by secret ballot.

- m. Once a candidate has been selected, the terms of the call shall be determined by majority vote of the congregation. Upon the establishment of the salary, each congregation would give consideration to the salary of a similar Protestant congregation in the community.
- n. Included in the terms of the office shall be:
 - 1. The basic salary of the Pastor.
 - 2. Half of Social Security determined on salary.
 - 3. Medical Insurance for the Pastor and his family.
 - 4. Living allowance if not living in the Parsonage
 - 5. Car allowance.
 - 6. Vacation allowances. One month of vacation after the first full year of service.
 - 7. Pension Participation. Ten percent of the basic salary or IRA contribution up the amount of \$2000.00 allowed by law.
 - 8. All moving expenses of the pastor and his family be paid by the congregation.
- o. Minutes of said meeting shall be forthwith forwarded to the Dean
- p. The elected pastor shall be immediately notified.

FINANCIAL ACTIVITY

- 51. An inventory of the real and personal property of the church and a statement of income and liabilities shall be annually prepared by the Church Council and forwarded to the Dean of the Classis.
- 52. The Treasurer of the church shall keep monthly record of the income and expenses of the church.
- 53. All checks issued on behalf of the church shall be signed by the Pastor, Chief Elder and Treasurer of the church.
- 54. The Church Council shall prudently attend to the payment of all indebtedness of the church.

55. A monthly summary of the income and expenses shall be prepared by the Treasurer and submitted to the Church Council.

56. An annual financial statement shall be prepared by the Treasurer and presented for approval to the congregation.

ASSESSMENTS

57. The church councils may promulgate such rules and regulations as they deem necessary for the welfare of their church, including, but not limited to, the assessment of dues.

58. Each congregation shall be assessed a specific sum per member of the congregation, as determined by the Assembly of the Classis, for the maintenance of a General Fund for the administrative expenses of the Classis.

59. Each congregation, shall be assessed a specific sum per member of the congregation, as determined by the General Assembly of the Synod, for the maintenance of a General Fund for the administrative expenses of the Synod.

THE CLASSIS

60. A Classis is formed by the union of several congregations, in order to create a higher authority with one administrative, governmental and disciplinary body.

61. There shall be four classis on the North American Continent: the Eastern Classis, the New York Classis, the Central Classis and the Western Classis. Changes in the geographical boundaries of said classis or creation of new classis may be made by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the classis or upon the initiative of the General Assembly.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CLASSIS

62. The affairs of the classis shall be administered by:

- a. Assembly of the Classis.
- b. The Dean.
- c. The Judicial Commission.

ASSEMBLY OF THE CLASSIS

63. The Assembly of the Classis shall be composed of:

- a. The Dean and Chief Elder, or their substitutes, as co-chairmen.
- b. All regular, stated or supply ministers, and pastors – at-large.
- c. One elder from each regular, associate and mission congregation elected by the Church Councils.
- d. Ecclesiastical and lay secretaries of the Classis and members of the Judicial Commission.
- e. Treasurer of the Classis.
- f. Controller of the Classis
- g. Counselor of the Classis (without the right of vote).

64. The Dean shall convene the Assembly of the Classis once each year. Special meetings of the Assembly may be called by the Dean. The Dean shall call a special meeting of the Assembly upon the request of the majority of the congregations in said Classis.

65. The Assembly of the Classis shall be:

- a. Opened and closed with prayer by the Dean.
- b. Open to members of the congregations, unless the chairman or one-third of the members present request a closed meeting.
- c. Presided over by the Dean or the Chief Elder, or their respective substitutes. Their substitutes shall be the oldest, in time of service, members of the Judicial Commission

66. The Assembly of the Classis shall have jurisdiction over all administrative matters involving congregations and the classis which are not specifically delegated to the Judicial Commission.

67. The jurisdiction of the Assembly includes:

- a. The confirmation of the election of pastors.
- b. Election of officers of the Classis to fill existing vacancies.

- c. The supervision of congregational matters; the ratification of its resolutions; and the examination of its annual accounts.
- d. The creation and designation of congregations and the supervision of associate and mission congregations. Such action shall be subject to confirmation by the General Assembly of the Synod.
- e. Supervision of the financial affairs of the Classis, including management of the treasury.
- f. Holding hearings on appeals concerning individual Church jurisdiction of the Judicial Commission.
- g. The institution of disciplinary procedures as hereinafter set forth.
- h. To protect the best interests of the Classis.
- i. The execution of resolutions of the General Assembly of the Synod as they apply to the Classis.

OFFICERS OF THE CLASSIS

THE DEAN

68. The Dean shall be elected from among the regular pastors of the Classis by the Church Councils of the individual congregations of the Classis. His election shall be confirmed by the Assembly of the Classis and reported to the General Assembly of the Synod. He shall take office upon administration of his official oath. The term of office shall be for a period of four years.

69. The office of the Dean shall be deemed vacant:

- a. At the end of the term for which he was elected.
- b. Upon his death, resignation, or removal from office as a result of disciplinary action.
- c. If he shall resign as pastor of a congregation in the Classis, and move into the geographical boundary of another Classis.

70. The Dean shall have the authority:

- a. To call into session the Assembly of the Classis and to preside over its deliberations.

- b. To represent the Classis, by virtue of his office, in the General Assembly of the Synod, its Judicial Commission and the Constitutional Assembly.
- c. To supervise the affairs of the congregation composing the said Classis.
- d. To supervise the election of pastors and the appointment of their substitutes.
- e. To represent the Classis, with the Chief Elder, before church and civil authorities.

71. An appeal from any action or decision of the Dean may be taken, within fifteen days thereof, to the Assembly of the Classis. Said appeal must be submitted through the office of the Dean. The decision of the Assembly of the Classis may be appealed, within fifteen days from the date thereof, to the General Assembly of the Synod. Neither of these appeals shall, act as a stay of the action or decision of the Dean.

72. The Dean shall be the supervisor of Classis officers and he shall execute all directives of the Assembly of the Classis.

73. The Dean shall annually visit all congregations of his Classy on a mutually agreed date. Prior to his visit, he shall notify the congregations, in writing, and the pastor of such congregation shall convene the Church Council on that date. The congregation shall reimburse the Dean for his board, lodging and travel expenses.

74. A written account of his visitations shall be kept by the Dean and shall contain his review of the following:

- a. The observance and order of Divine Services.
- b. The method of expounding the Bible and Confessions.
- c. The administration of confirmation
- d. Attendance at Divine Services.
- e. The number of those partaking in the Lord's Supper.
- f. Gains and losses in membership by conversion.
- g. The practice of charity.
- h. The care of the poor and destitute.

- i. Visitation of members and the sick.
- j. Inter-denominational grievances.
- k. The conduct of Church Council meetings.
- l. The conduct of congregational meetings.
- m. Record of communications sent and received.
- n. The register of the congregation.
- o. The inventory of the assets of the congregation.
- p. The liens and encumbrances existing against the real estate owned by the congregation.
- q. The receipt and use of the general and trust funds.
- r. The posting and auditing of the financial assets of the congregation.
- s. The remuneration paid to officers of the congregation.
- t. The financial and spiritual aspects of educational activity of the congregation.
- u. The official and moral conduct of the officers of the congregation.

Such accounts shall be submitted to the Annual Meeting of the Assembly of the Classis.

CHIEF ELDER

75. A chief elder shall be elected by the Church Councils of the congregations from among the elders of the congregations. His term of office shall be for a period of four years. His election shall be confirmed by the Assembly of the Classis. He shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath. His election shall be reported to the General Assembly of the Synod.

76. The office of the chief elder shall become vacant upon the expiration of the term, his resignation, death or removal as a result of disciplinary action against him, or his relocation beyond the geographical boundaries of the Classis.

77. The jurisdiction and duties of the chief elder are:

- a. To preside as co-chairman at meetings of the Assembly of the Classis.
- b. To represent the Classis, by virtue of his office in the General Assembly, Judicial Commission and Constitutional Assembly of the Synod.
- c. To supervise the financial matters of the Classis.
- d. To be a faithful and industrious member within his own congregation.
- e. To represent the Classis, with the Dean, before civil authorities.

COUNSELOR

78. The Counsellor, an attorney-at-law, shall be elected by the Assembly of the Classis. He shall assume office upon the administration of his official oath. He shall serve at the pleasure of the Assembly.

79. The duties of the Counselor shall be:

- a. To render legal opinions to the Assembly of the Classis.
- b. To represent the Classis, when authorized by the Assembly of the Classis or the Dean, before Judicial Commissions, civil courts or authorities.
- c. To represent the Classis as complainant in disciplinary matters.
- d. To partake in the deliberation of the Judicial Commission of the Classis with the right to make recommendations.

TREASURER

80. The Treasurer shall be elected by the Assembly of the Classis from among its lay members. His term of office shall be for a period of four years. He shall handle its monies according to the directives of the Assembly and under the supervision of the dean and chief elder. He shall assume office upon administration of the official oath. He shall be bonded.

SECRETARIES

81. An ecclesiastical and a lay secretary shall be elected by the Assembly of the Classis from among the ministers and elders of the Classis. Their term of office shall be for four years. They shall assume office upon administration of the official oath.

82. The duties of the secretaries shall be:

- a. To keep the records of the General Assembly of the Classis.
- b. To edit and record all judgments and decisions of the Judicial Commission and Assembly of the Classis.
- c. The ecclesiastical secretary shall, as stated clerk, be deputy of the Dean in, administrative matters.

CONTROLLER

83. The Controller shall be elected by the Assembly of the Classis from among its ecclesiastical or lay member. His term of office shall be for a period of four years. He shall annually check the financial books of the Treasurer and report on its accuracy at the Annual Assembly of the Classis.

THE SYNOD

84. The Synod is formed by the joinder of three or more classis creating a higher authority with one administrative, governmental, and disciplinary body.

85. The classis of the Hungarian Reformed Church on the North American continent shall constitute one Synod. The duly constituted officers of the Synod shall represent the Church in its relations with other denominations and the state.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SYNOD

86. The affairs of the Synod shall be administered by:

- a. The General Assembly of the Synod.
- b. The Bishop.
- c. The Judicial Commission of the Synod.

ASSETS OF THE SYNOD

87. The Synod shall maintain:

- a. A General Fund for administrative expenses.
- b. A Mission Fund for the propagation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in whatever manner, among Hungarian Reformed People. This fund shall

derive from voluntary contributions of the congregations, of individuals, or by the proceeds of special appeals.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

88. The General Assembly of the Synod shall be composed of:

- a. The Bishop.
- b. The Chief – Elder.
- c. The Dean and Chief Elder of each Classis.
- d. An ecclesiastical and lay representative from each Classis.
- e. Such additional representatives of each Classy as determined by the General Assembly of the Synod.
- f. The ecclesiastical and lay secretaries.
- g. Members of the Judicial Commission of the Synod.
- h. The Treasurer of the Synod.
- i. The Counselor of the Synod.
- j. The Controller of the Synod.

89. The General Assembly of the Synod shall be convened quadrennially upon the call of the Bishop. Special meetings may be convened by the Bishop or Bishop's Council. Upon the denominational elections each regular congregation would have two votes, while other congregations, such as associate or mission congregations only 1 vote.

90. The meetings of the General Assembly shall be opened with devotions.

91. All meetings of the General Assembly shall be open to members of the Church.

92. In the event the Bishop is not in attendance, one of the Deans, in order of seniority in office, shall preside at the General Assembly.

93. The General Assembly of the Synod shall have jurisdiction:

- a. To guard the purity of the Gospel so as to be taught and preached according to the spirit of the confessions of the Church.

- b. To promulgate rules of order and regulations.
- c. To elect examining and qualifying committees for ministers.
- d. To direct the ordination of candidates to the ministry.
- e. To elect ecclesiastical and lay secretaries, the treasurer and the controller
- f. To safeguard the autonomous rights of the Church.
- g. To supervise the financial affairs of the Synod, including the management of the General Fund and of the Mission Fund of the Synod.
- h. To approve the creation, modification or change in the status of various types of congregations, including their admission to and release from the Synod as well as their dissolution.
- i. To assign the congregations to the respective classes.
- j. To supervise the affairs of the classes, ratify their resolutions and audit their annual financial statements.
- k. To confirm the decisions of the Bishop's Council.

OFFICERS OF THE SYNOD

BISHOP

94. The Bishop shall be elected from among the ministers in good standing with the Hungarian Reformed Church in America. The Bishop shall be elected by the Church Councils of the regular, associate and mission Churches of the Synod.

95. The term of office of the Bishop, shall be four years. He may be elected for two consecutive terms after which he becomes un-electable.

96. The General Assembly of the Synod shall validate the election of a Bishop.

97. The Bishop shall be installed at the meeting of the General Assembly by his Predecessors and the Deans. He shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath.

98. The office, of Bishop shall be vacant upon:

- a. Termination of his term of office.
- b. Death.
- c. Resignation.
- d. Removal as a result of disciplinary action.

99. In the event of incapacity of the Bishop, the administrative functions of the Synod shall be performed by the stated clerk of the Synod; the presiding officer at all sessions of the Bishop's Council and the General Assembly of the Synod shall be the Dean with seniority in office.

100. The duties and jurisdiction of the Bishop are:

- a. To call and preside at all sessions of the Bishop's Council and as co-chairman with the Chief Elder at the General Assembly.
- b. To represent, together with the Chief Elder, the Church before civil authorities and in interchurch relations.
- c. To supervise the life of the classes.

- d. To visit, at least once during his term of office, every congregation of the Synod. He shall be accompanied by the dean and /or chief elder of the respective classis. The congregation visited shall reimburse the Bishop for his travel, board and lodging expenses.
- e. To appoint pastors-at-large.
- f. To be the chairman, by virtue of his office, of the ministerial qualifying committee.
- g. To grant temporary authority to seminary students or graduates to administer the sacraments and to perform pastoral duties.
- h. To grant temporary authority to ministers of other denominations to perform pastoral duties.
- i. To supervise, with the chief elder, the fiscal affairs of the Synod.
- j. To take judicial action in conjunction with the Chief Elder and with notice to the respective Dean, under such circumstances which, in his discretion, dictates immediate action, and which he deems detrimental to the best interests and well being of the Church. An appeal from such decision and /or action may be filed with the General Assembly of the Synod within fifteen days of such action. Such appeal shall not stay the decision or action.
- k. To deliver a state of the church message at each regular meeting of the General Assembly.

THE CHIEF ELDER

101. The Chief Elder shall be elected from among the elders of the congregations comprising the Synod, by the church councils of said congregations.

102. The term of office of the Chief Elder shall be four years. He may be elected for two consecutive terms, after which he becomes un-electable.

103. The General Assembly of the Synod shall validate the election of a Chief Elder.

104. The Chief Elder shall be installed at the meeting of the General Assembly of the Synod. He shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath.

105. The office of Chief Elder shall be vacant upon:

- a. Termination of his term of office.

- b. Death.
- c. Resignation.
- d. Removal as a result of disciplinary action.

106. In the event of incapacity of the Chief Elder, his duties shall be performed by a classis chief elder with seniority in office.

107. The duties and jurisdiction of the Chief Elder are:

- a. To preside, as co-chairman with the Bishop, at sessions of the General Assembly of the Synod.
- b. To represent, together with the Bishop, the Church before civil authorities and in interchurch relations.
- c. To supervise, with the Bishop, the fiscal affairs of the Synod.
- d. To cooperate with the Bishop in emergent judicial action.

COUNSELLOR

108. The Legal Counsellor of the Synod shall be elected by the General Assembly.

109. He shall be an attorney-at-law.

110. He shall serve at the pleasure of the General Assembly.

111. He shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath.

TREASURER

112. The Treasurer shall be elected by the General Assembly of the Synod from among the elders of the congregations.

113. His term of office shall be four years.

114. The office of Treasurer shall be vacant upon: the expiration of his term, death, resignation or removal from office as a result of disciplinary action.

115. His duty shall be to maintain the fiscal records of the Synod.

116. He shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath.

SECRETARIES

117. The ecclesiastical and lay secretaries shall be elected by the General Assembly of the Synod from among the pastors and elders of the congregations.

118. Their term of office shall be four years.

119. The office of secretary shall be vacant upon: the expiration of their terms, death, resignation or removal from office as a result of disciplinary action.

120. The Ecclesiastical Secretary shall, as Stated Clerk, be the official deputy of the Bishop.

121. They shall assume office upon the administration of the official oath.

CONTROLLER

122. The Controller shall be elected by the General Assembly of the Synod. The duties of the Controller shall be to examine the financial books of the Synod Treasurer and report on its accuracy at the General Assembly of the Synod.

THE BISHOP'S COUNCIL

123. The Bishop's Council shall be composed of two classes of members, regular and advisory /consultant/.

- a. The regular members shall be the Bishop, the Chief Elder, Ecclesiastical Secretary, the Lay Secretary, Deans of the Classes, the Chief Elders of the Classes, the Synod Treasurer, the Synod Controller;
- b. Advisory members shall be: the Synod's legal Counsellor, the editor of the official publications of the Synod; all former Bishops and Chief Elders.

124. The Bishop's Council shall, in interim between sessions of the General Assembly, function as the administrative body of the Synod.

JUDICIAL COMMISSIONS

125. Each congregation, classis and the Synod shall have a Judicial Commission. The jurisdiction of the Commission shall be to hear and determine disputed administrative and disciplinary matters.

126. Judicial Commission of the congregations:

a. In congregations having less than 100 adult members, the Church Council shall compose the Judicial Commission. In congregations having more than 100 adult members, the Church Council shall elect, from among its members, four members who, with the pastor, shall compose the Judicial Commission. Written notice of the election of the members of the Judicial Commission shall be given to the Dean. Their term of office shall be determined by the respective Church Council.

b. The Judicial Commission of a congregation shall determine all appropriate matters, with the exception of disciplinary proceedings involving the Pastor, Chief Elder, Treasurer and other members of the Church Council.

c. The Pastor shall be the Chairman of said Judicial Commission. A quorum shall consist of at least two members and the Pastor. The Pastor may cast a vote only in the event of a tie vote.

d. The Legal Counsellor of the congregation shall attend all sessions of the Judicial Commission.

e. Minutes shall be kept of each session of the Judicial Commission. Said minutes shall be open to all members of the Church Council.

127. Judicial Commission of the Classis:

a. The Judicial Commission of the classis shall be composed of the Dean and Chief Elder, and three ecclesiastical and three lay judges elected for a term of four years by the Church Councils of all congregations in said classis.

b. The Chairman of the Judicial Commission shall be the Dean or the Chief-Elder, as determined in each case, by the officers of the Classis.

c. The Judicial Commission shall convene upon the call of the Dean.

d. A quorum shall consist of at least four members and the chairman. The chairman may cast a vote only in the event of a tie vote.

e. The Legal Counsellor of the Classis shall attend all sessions of the Commission.

f. Minutes of all sessions shall be taken by a secretary designated by the Chairman.

g. The jurisdiction of the Judicial Commission of the Classis shall be complaints:

1. Involving election of officers and/or church councils of congregations.
2. Between regular and associated or affiliated congregations.
3. Regarding use of church property.
4. Regarding payment of remuneration to congregation officers.
5. Regarding financial support of congregations.
6. Regarding duties of congregation officers, and/or church council members.
7. Disciplinary matters involving officers and/or employees of the classis, with the exception of the Dean and Chief Elder.
8. Disciplinary matters involving the Pastor, Chief Elder, Treasurer and /or members of the Church Councils.
9. All appeals from the Judicial Commission of the congregations.
10. Such other matters as are referred to it by the Dean.

128. Judicial Commission of the Synod:

a. The Judicial Commission of the Synod shall be composed of the Bishop and Chief Elder of the Synod, three ecclesiastical judges and three lay judges elected for a term of four years by the Church Councils.

b. The chairman of the Judicial Commission of the Synod shall be the Bishop or Chief Elder as determined, in each case, by the officers of the Synod.

- c. The Judicial Commission of the Synod shall convene upon the call of the Bishop.
- d. A quorum shall consist of four members and the chairman. The chairman may cast a vote only in the event of a tie vote.
- e. The Legal Counsellor of the Synod shall attend all sessions of the Judicial Commission.
- f. Minutes of all sessions of the Judicial Commission shall be taken by a secretary designated by the Chairman.
- g. The jurisdiction of the Judicial Commission of the Synod shall be

complaints:

1. Involving the Deans of the Classis.
2. Involving the Chief Elders of the Classes.
3. Involving other officers of the Synod other than the Bishop or Chief Elder.
4. All appeals from the Judicial Commissions of the classes.
5. Involving the Bishop or the Chief Elder of the Synod shall be determined by the General Assembly of the Synod.

129. Complaints requesting disciplinary action may be made upon the following grounds:

- a. Violations of duties imposed by civil laws or the By-Laws of the Church.
- b. Commission of crimes prohibited by civil law.
- c. Making false accusations, verbally or in writing, before Church authorities.
- d. Willful and deliberate violations of the laws moral and doctrinal tenets of the Church.
- e. Violations of oath of office.

130. In order to avoid impropriety, or the appearance of impropriety, all members of any Judicial Commission who have a direct or indirect interest in the outcome of the matter to be determined, are subject to disqualification by a majority vote of the remaining members of the Commission.

PROCEDURE

131. All complaints shall be submitted in writing to the Chairman of the Judicial Commission of original jurisdiction, who shall, upon determining that, said complaint is proper as to form and has been submitted to the Judicial Commission of Venue, forward a true copy of said complaint to the person or persons against whom the complaint shall be directed by certified mail, return receipt requested. Accompanying said complaint shall be a written notice advising the defendant that he must file with the chairman a written answer within fifteen days of receipt of the said complaint. The chairman shall have the right to extend the time within which an answer is to be filed an additional period of fifteen days. The defendant shall have a right to file a counter-complaint against the complainant. Said counter-complaint shall be filed with the chairman within the time allowed for filing of an answer. A true copy of said counter-complaint shall be forwarded by certified mail, return receipt requested, by the chairman to the complainant. The complainant shall have the same time to file an answer to said counter-complaint as the defendant had to file his answer.

132. If the chairman shall deem it appropriate, he shall summon the complainant and defendant to meet with him within fifteen days after all pleadings are due for the purpose of attempting a settlement. A notation of any agreement of settlement shall be filed with the pleadings in the matter.

133. Should no settlement conference be called, or should the parties be unwilling or unable to arrive at a settlement, all pleadings shall forthwith be forwarded to the counselor of the Judicial Commission for an opinion as to whether said matter should be submitted to the Judicial Commission. Upon receipt of the counselor's recommendation, the Chairman shall determine whether the matter shall be submitted to the Judicial Commission or be terminated. The decision to terminate shall be communicated to the parties by certified mail, return receipt requested. Said decision to terminate is appealable within fifteen days from receipt of notice thereof.

134. If the chairman shall deem it necessary, he may order an investigation of all or some of the charges contained in the complaint and/or counter complaint. He shall appoint such person or persons as he shall deem necessary to make said investigation. The cost of said investigation shall be borne by the complainant and /or counter-complainant. The estimated cost of such investigation shall be determined by the chairman and shall be paid by the complainant and/or counter

complainant prior to the commencement of said investigation. Should the complaining parties, or either of them, fail to advance said costs, the chairman may terminate the proceedings as to the complaint filed by said defaulting party.

135. Costs of investigation of complaints filed by a representative of a church body, by virtue of his office, shall be paid from the treasury of said church body.

136. The investigator or investigators shall notify in writing all persons they wish to interrogate as to the time and place where such interrogation shall take place. Said investigator or investigators shall have the authority to summon witnesses. All testimony shall be taken under oath.

137. Minutes of such investigation shall be taken and forwarded, along with a statement of itemized expenses, to the chairman. Should such complainant and/or counter-complainant prior to trial.

TRIAL

138. A member of the Judicial Commission shall be designated by the Chairman to be the Prosecutor. All documents, reports, and copies of minutes concerning said matter shall be forwarded to said prosecutor in sufficient time for the proper preparation of the case.

139. The members of the Judicial Commission, the counsellor, the parties to the matter, and all witnesses for the complainant and/or counter-complainant shall be notified in writing as to the time and place of the trial. No witness will be notified or summoned unless the chairman shall have been requested to do so in writing at least 20 days prior to date of trial, and the costs to be incurred by said witness is simultaneously paid by the party requesting his presence.

140. All trials shall be open to members of the congregations unless three-quarters of the Judicial Commission shall determine otherwise. All parties may be represented by legal counsel. All parties to the matter shall have the right to present a statement prior to the taking of testimony. Each party shall have the right of cross-examination of the witnesses of the other party. Each party shall have the right to present a summation upon conclusion of all testimony.

141. The Judicial Commission or the complainant may summon witnesses. The costs of travel, lodging and board shall be the sole responsibility of the body or person summoning the witness.

142. The legal counselor of the respective church body shall be the sole arbiter of all questions or motions regarding the constitution and by-laws procedure and law.

143. The Chairman of the Judicial Commission shall preside at the trial. He shall:

- a. Read aloud the complaint, answer, and counter-complaint and answer, if any.
- b. Determine, the presence of a quorum.
- c. Ask for and dispose of objections preliminary to trial.

Any action or ruling of the Chairman may be overruled by a majority vote of the Judicial Commission.

144. Interrogation of witnesses shall be by the parties to said matter or their counsel, the members of the Judicial Commission and the counsellor.

145. The Judicial Commission shall decide the matter in closed session.

146. The decision of the Judicial Commission may be made orally at the conclusion of the hearing or in writing, served upon the parties by certified mail, return receipt requested, subsequent to the trial. The decision shall contain: a statement as to the date and time of trial; the complaints; in disciplinary proceedings, the guilt or acquittal of the defendant; the penalty, if any, imposed; whether said penalty or disposition may be stayed pending appeal; the assessment of costs, if any, and a statement as to factors considered in arriving at the conclusion expressed. Judgments of a Judicial Commission in disciplinary hearings may include:

- a. Reprimand.
- b. A fine.
- c. Suspension without pay for a stated period of time.
- d. Suspension of rights as a member of any congregation.
- e. Removal from office.
- f. Excommunication.

A complaint requesting disciplinary action may not be filed more than one year after the alleged act complained of.

147. All decisions of Judicial Commissions, other than that of the Synod, are appealable to the next highest Commission within fifteen days from receipt of the decision.

148. Detailed and accurate minutes of all sessions of a Judicial Commission shall be kept. Transcripts of said minutes shall be distributed to the parties involved,

containing the signatures of the chairman and secretary, when requested by any party to said matter.

149. In the case of an appeal, a transcript of the minutes shall be forwarded to the chairman of the Judicial Commission before whom the appeal is to be heard.

150. In the case of an appeal, the parties thereto may present additional testimony.

151. The Judicial Commission before which the appeal is tried shall render a new decision either affirming the prior rendered decision or reversing the prior decision in whole or in part.

152. Each Judicial Commission before which an appeal is tried shall comply with the provisions contained in paragraphs 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, and 148.

153. The filing of an appeal shall not stay the judgment of the Judicial Commission from whose decision the appeal is filed.

154. An application for a new trial may be made within two years from the date of the decision of the highest Judicial Commission hearing said matter, and said application shall be made to said Commission. The sole basis for said application shall be newly discovered evidence. Newly discovered evidence shall mean such evidence was not available to the party at the time of the hearing or was not known to the party after exercise of due diligence. The entire cost of the new trial shall be the sole responsibility of the party making the application for a new trial. The decision of said Commission shall be final.

155. The filing of an application for a new trial shall not stay the judgment previously rendered.

AMENDMENTS

156. These By-Laws may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the members of the General Assembly of the Synod provided that written notice of the proposed amendments shall be forwarded to the Pastor and the Chief Elder of each congregation at least three months prior to meeting of said Assembly at which the amendments are to be considered.

MISCELLANEOUS

157. In all references in this Constitution and By-Laws to any persons, the use of any particular gender is intended to include both male and female.

This Constitution was adopted at the Constitutional Assembly of The Hungarian Reformed Church in America held on June 2, 1975 in Ligonier, Pennsylvania, and was amended at the General Assembly meeting held on April 13, 1991 in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and on November 21, 1998 in New York City.

Rt Rev. Alexander Forró

Bishop

Mr. Stephen Szabó

Chief Elder of the Synod

Rev. Stefan M. Török

Ecclesiastical Secretary

Mr. Zoltan Ambrus

Lay Secretary

Rev. Dr. Imre Bertalan, and Rev. Andor Demeter

Deans

Mr. Bálint Balogh, Mr. Zoltán Kun and Mr. László B. Ványi

Chief Elders of the Classis

Miss Priscilla Hunyady

Treasurer

Mr. William Puskás Jr. Esq.

Counsellor

Rev. Péter Tóth, Rev. Árpád Drotos, Rev. Pál Mező

Ecclesiastical Judges

Mr. Frank Király, Mr. Albert Kaszás, Mr. István Farkas

Lay Judge