

IPC MAIN CONSTITUTION (1978)
With schedule incorporating Original Material from the
International Church Presbyterian Réformée
(as registered with the Charity Commission)

T H I S D E C L A R A T I O N of the Constitution of the International Presbyterian Church is made this 11th day of April 1978 by the Synod of the Church.

In this deed:

“The Church” means all that part of the Church known as the International Presbyterian Church now assembled in the United Kingdom and carrying on worship from time to time at premises known as the Church Building at Liss, Hampshire and further premises known as 52 Cleveland Road Ealing London W.13 and/or whatever further or other premises in the United Kingdom may be acquired hereafter by the Church.

“The Members of the Congregations” mean those persons who have attained such only after an examination conducted by the Session of the particular Congregation to ascertain whether or not that particular person has a credible profession of faith as a believer of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as enunciated by the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

“The Session” means all those Elders of a particular Congregation from time to time elected to that office by members of the Congregation and ordained as such by the Synod.

“The Presbytery” means all those Sessions of the Church in the United Kingdom.

“The Synod” means those two Presbyteries of the Church in the United Kingdom and the Church in Switzerland and Italy and any further or other Presbyteries which may hereafter be formed.

W H E R E A S

By properly convened meetings of the Synod on 21st September 1969 held at 52 Cleveland Road, Ealing London W.13 and held at the Manor House Greatham Liss Hants., two Congregations with members were formed and the Elders and Pastors thereof were elected and duly appointed in accordance with the Presbyterian form of Church government.

The Congregations having been duly formed as aforesaid have continued regularly and consistently to function as Churches for the purposes of the public worship of God and the preaching and teaching of the Holy Scriptures

of the Old and New Testaments at 52 Cleveland Road aforesaid and at the Church Building at Liss, Hampshire aforesaid.

The Synod is now desirous of formally declaring the Constitution of the Church.

NOW THIS DEED SHOWS THAT

1. The doctrines to be preached or taught in the Church or in any school for religious or for secular and religious instruction. In connection therewith shall be such as are (a) founded upon the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and (b) agreeable to the body of Christian doctrine contained in the following documents drawn up by Assembly of Divines convened at Westminster in the year 1643 (that is to say) the confession of faith and the larger and shorter catechisms and subject to such other statements of faith as have been or may from time to time be adopted by the Synod as authorised expressions of the doctrine of the Church.

2. The worship to be observed and conducted In the Church and the government and discipline of the congregations from time to time belonging to the Church and the ministrations and duties of the pastors, elders and deacons thereof shall be such as are consistent with the Presbyterian form of church government with and subject to such interpretation modification or alteration thereof as has been or may from time to time be made by the Synod having regard in particular to those statements, rules and other expressions enunciated in the schedule hereto.

3. The following provisions shall apply to the Sessions of each Congregation:

(a) The Sessions have religious authority over their congregation that is to say the superintendence and control of the spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs of the congregation and the administration of such affairs of the congregation in all respects shall be in accordance with such rules, regulations and forms of procedure as are or may be approved and adopted from time to time by the Session PROVIDED ALWAYS that the exercise of such authority is subject to the revision and control of the Presbytery and the Synod.

(b) The Session is permitted to receive all moneys contributed or subscribed whether collected by private gift or in public meetings and after providing thereout for the expenses of maintaining the premises used by the Church (including any expenses incurred in the repair alteration or improvement of the same or the purchase of any other promises for use by the Church) shall pay such sum for the support of the pastor as the members of the Congregation shall have determined and shall apply the remainder in payment of the incidental and other expenses attending the maintenance of Divine Worship on the premises and for such other charitable and/or religious purposes as the members of the Congregation may decide. But moneys contributed to or

subscribed for any specified purpose shall not be subject to this clause but shall be applied for such specified purpose.

(c) The Session may at such times as It thinks fit convene congregational meetings by notice announcing the place day and hour of the meeting and the matters to be considered thereat. The only persons who shall be entitled to vote at a congregational meeting shall be those who are members of the Congregation. No votes shall be given by proxy but votes may be given by ballot-or otherwise as the Session may direct. All proceedings and resolutions of congregational meetings shall be evidenced by a minute thereof under the hand of a person appointed for that task by the Session and such minute shall be conclusive evidence that any resolution therein expressed to have been passed was passed at a meeting duly convened and held and by the requisite majority.

(d) The Presbytery shall attend the annual general meeting convened by the Synod from time to time each year. In witness whereof the trustees hereinafter mentioned In pursuance of Section 34 of the Charities Act 1960 and in exercise of the power conferred upon them by a resolution of the Synod passed the first day of January 1978 have hereunto set their respective hands and seals this 11th day of April, 1978

THE SCHEDULE BEFORE REFERRED TO

Local Churches and the Synod

Chapters 13, 14 and 15 of the Book of Acts together with the remainder of the New Testament make it clear that local Churches and Synods (or Councils) are both pleasing to God and commanded by Him.

Almighty God in His providence has permitted that different portions of His Church should be governed in various ways, and has blessed bodies differently governed as His fruitful branches. Rejoicing in this fact and in no wise casting reflections upon bodies differently governed, we nevertheless believe that government by presbyters is founded upon the Word of God and the practice of the early church and is highly expedient.

We believe that government by presbyters (elders), namely pastors and ruling elders is agreeable to the Word of God, and is highly expedient. These two categories of presbyters, as their New Testament description of “bishop” (*episkopos*) indicates, are joined in the oversight of the Church. The distinction between the two indicates NO superiority the one over the other, all are together responsible for the teaching, disciplining and shepherding of Christ’s flock. While pastors are not necessary for the wellbeing of the Church, it is evident from Scripture that pastors are most helpful to the well-being, of the Church. The distinction between pastors and ruling elders is, therefore, to

be seen only as one of expedience and not office. All presbyters are alike responsible for teaching in the Church as Paul indicates in I Timothy 3:2 when he says “The bishop must be a good teacher” (NEB) but this does not imply that all must either necessarily preach or equally preach in the public worship of the Church.

Believing the local Churches, presbyteries and synods are founded upon and agreeable to the Word of God, we authorize the spiritual government of this Church by sessions, presbyteries and synods, which are to be composed only of presbyters.

These councils shall not possess any civil jurisdiction, nor may they inflict any civil penalties. Their power is wholly moral and spiritual, and that only ministerial and declarative of the Word of God.

The ordinary and perpetual officers in this Church are presbyters (comprising pastors and ruling elders) and deacons.

Presbyters

The person who fills the office of presbyter has, in Scripture, obtained different names expressive of his various duties. As he has the oversight of the flock of Christ, he is termed Shepherd. As he serves Christ in his Church, he is termed minister. As it is his duty to be grave and prudent, and an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and kingdom of Christ, he is termed presbyter or elder. As he is sent to declare the will of God to sinners, and to beseech them to be reconciled to God through Christ, he is termed ambassador. And, as he dispenses the manifold grace of God, and the ordinances instituted by Christ, he is termed steward of the mysteries of God, and in humility he is the servant of Christ, separated unto the Gospel of God.

Deacons

The scriptures clearly point out deacons as distinct officers in the Church, whose business it is to take care of the poor and to distribute among them the collection which may be raised for their use.

The Church Session

The church session consists of the pastor (or pastors) and ruling elders, of a particular congregation. The pastor shall be the moderator of the local session and shall be answerable to the synod for the teaching of the local congregation. Every session shall keep a clear record of its proceedings which record shall be, at least once in every year, submitted to the inspection of the Synod.

Every session shall keep registers or rolls of the members of the Church, both of believers and also of their baptized children, of suspensions from the Lord's Table, of the deaths and other removals of church members but the names of members shall be placed upon or removed from the rolls of the church only by order of the session.

The Presbytery

Where necessary a presbytery may be formed in a particular geographical location as an intermediate body between the local Session and the synod. All pastors and elders in such an area shall be members of the presbytery.

The Synod

The Synod of this Church shall consist of all presbyters from the local churches. If a presbyter for good and acceptable reason ceases to be a member of a congregation of the Church, the Synod may invite him to continue as a member of Synod from year to year.

The officers of the Synod shall be the moderator and the Stated Clerk. These are to be elected every year. The Synod, in accordance with the Presbyterian form of government shall have the power to do these things which will enable the International Presbyterian Church to function as a Church. It shall receive and issue all appeals and complaints that affect the doctrine or Constitution of the Church. The Synod shall review the records of every church; it shall give its advice and instruction, in all cases submitted to it; and it shall constitute the bond of union, peace, correspondence, and mutual confidence among all our churches.

To the Synod also belongs the power of deciding in all controversies respecting doctrine and discipline; of reproof, warning, or bearing testimony against error in doctrine, or immorality in practice, church, of erecting new local churches, of corresponding with other churches, on such terms as may be agreed upon by the synod and the corresponding body, of recommending and aiding promotion of charity truth, and holiness, through all the churches.

Electing and Ordaining Deacons

1 Timothy 3 sets forth the Scriptural standards for deacons. Every congregation may elect persons to the office of deacon in whatever manner it way approve. In all cases, the person elected must be a member in full communion in the church in which he is to exercise his office.

When any person shall have been elected to this office, and shall have declared his willingness to accept it, he shall be set apart in the following manner:

After a Sermon one of the elders shall state, in a concise manner the warrant and nature of the office of deacon, together with the character proper to be sustained, and the duties to be fulfilled by the officer elect; having done this, he shall propose to the candidate in the presence of the congregation, the following questions, viz.

- 1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice without error not only where they speak of religious matters, but also where they speak of history, the cosmos and ethical matters?
- 2) Do you approve of the Presbyterian system of government?

3) Do you accept the office of deacon in this congregation, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof?

4) Do you promise to study the purity, peace, and unity of the Church?

The deacon elect, having answered these questions in the affirmative, the elder concerned shall address to the members of the church the following questions, viz:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a deacon, and do you promise to yield to him all that honour, encouragement and obedience in the Lord, to which his office according to the Word of God, and the constitution of this Church, entitles him?

The members of the church having answered this question in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the session shall proceed to set apart the candidate, to the office of deacon with the laying on of hands and prayer.

The Bible also affirms the office of deaconess. The same selection, election and ordination applies as with deacons.

Election of Presbyters (including Pastors and Ruling Elders)

It should be noted that 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:1-9 include the Scriptural standard for Presbyters, as well as for deacons.

When the people of a congregation appear prepared to elect a pastor or ruling elder, the session shall take measures to convene them for this purpose and it shall always be a duty of the session to convene them, when a majority of the persons entitled to vote in the case, shall, by a petition, request that a meeting be called. Presbyters must be men.

When such a meeting is intended, the session may solicit the presence and counsel of some representatives of a neighbouring session or sessions to assist them in conducting the election contemplated, but they may proceed without assistance. In either case no presbyter may be elected without the approval of the synod.

All presbyters will be members of the congregation in which they serve.

Ruling Elders

When a congregation shall elect a ruling elder and call him to that office the ruling elder is to be examined and ordained by the synod. If a ruling elder shall be called (with the approval of the synod) as a pastor by the congregation over which he is an elder or by any other congregation he is to be installed as pastor by the synod.

Pastors

When a call shall be presented to any pastor or candidate, it shall always be viewed as a sufficient petition from the people for his installation. The acceptance of a call, by a pastor or candidate, shall always be considered as a request, on his part, to be installed at the same time. And when a candidate

shall be ordained in consequence of a call from any congregation, the Synod shall, at the same time, if practicable, install him pastor of that congregation.

In the case of a call to a pastor, the call shall be presented to the Synod so that, if the Synod think it expedient to present the call to him, it may be accordingly presented, and no pastor or candidate shall receive a call but through the hands of the Synod.

The Ordination of Presbyter (Pastors and Ruling Elders)

The day appointed for ordination or installation being come and the Synod convened, a presbyter, previously appointed to that duty, shall preach a sermon adapted to the occasion. A member of the Synod appointed to preside, shall afterwards briefly recite from the pulpit, in the audience of the people, the proceedings of the Synod preparatory to this transaction; he shall point out the nature and importance of the ordinance, and endeavour to impress the audience with a proper sense of the solemnity of the transaction.

Then, addressing himself to the candidate, he shall propose to him the following questions, viz:

- 1) Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, without error not only where they speak of religious matters, but also where they speak of history, the cosmos and ethical matters?
- 2) Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
- 3) Do you approve of the Presbyterian form of government?
- 4) Do you promise such subjection to your brethren as is taught in the Word of God?
- 5) Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to seek the office of pastor (or ruling elder, as the case may be) from love to God, and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the Gospel of His Son?
- 6) Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the Gospel, and the purity and peace of the Church whatever the persecution or opposition may arise unto you on that account?
- 7) Do you engage to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all private and personal duties, which become you as a Christian and a minister of the Gospel, as well as in all relative duties, and the public duties of your office, endeavouring to adorn the profession of the Gospel by your conversation, and walking with exemplary piety before the flock over which God shall make you overseer?

8) Are you now willing to take oversight of this congregation? And do you promise to discharge the duties of a pastor (or ruling elder, as the case may be) to them, as God shall give you strength?

The candidate having answered these questions in the affirmative, the presiding presbyter shall propose to the people the following questions:

- 1) Do you, the people of this congregation, continue to profess your readiness to receive whom you have chosen to be your pastor (or ruling elder)?
- 2) Do you promise to receive his teaching from the Word of God, with meekness and love, and do you promise to yield him all that honour, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord, to which his office, according to the Word of God, and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?
- 3) Do you promise to encourage him in his arduous labour, and to assist his endeavours for your instruction and spiritual edification?
- 4) (In the case of the pastor only), Do you acknowledge the Scriptural principle to continue to the pastor that material maintenance which is his due?

In the case of ordination and installation, the people having answered their questions in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the candidate shall kneel and the Synod shall ordain him and install him by the laying on of hands and prayer.

In the case of installation only, the people having answered their questions in the affirmative, by holding up their right hands, the Synod shall install the pastor (or ruling elder) with prayer.

Duly executed, etc.