ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

WELCOME PACKET
JUNE 2021

Cover Letter 1
Congregational Partnership Pathway 2
Organizational Convictions 4
Strategic Priorities 7
Relational Matrix 8
Congregational Partnership Covenant 9
Status and Support of Pastors 10
Congregational Request for Affiliation 11
Congregational Reflection 13

Alliance of Reformed Churches
3140 Division Ave SW, Suite A
Grandville, MI 49418
www.arc21.org
Greetings in the Name of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church!

We are thankful to God for your interest in the Alliance of Reformed Churches. We are a community of congregations who desire to live in an intentional covenanted community. We believe that through this partnership in the Gospel, the Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC) provides us with an opportunity to spur one another on in faith and mission.

We invite you to consider whether the ARC would be a faithful partner for your local congregation as we journey through the 21st century. We exist to encourage and equip congregations to:

- Make disciples who follow Jesus.
- Equip people for Kingdom work (personally, locally, regionally and globally).
- Bring new ministries to life that share the gospel in their context.

The ARC is a newly-formed organization and this is its initial packet of documentation. It is, in many ways, experimental and will require you as its first users to help us by providing feedback about its clarity, helpfulness, and adequacy. Please know that your thoughts and reflections on this packet are welcomed by (might we even say, necessary for) the ARC to grow effectively into God’s future. Thanks in advance for any feedback you provide.

If there are other things you thought should be included in this introductory packet, but were not, please let us know. We are, and always will be, committed to continuous improvement and relentless innovation.

When your packet is complete, please return electronic responses via email to: info@arc21.org.

If you would prefer to mail a hard copy of the packet and forms, please mail to:

Alliance of Reformed Churches
3140 Division Ave SW, Suite A
Grandville, MI 49418

May God bless you as you consider your future with the Alliance of Reformed Churches.
**Congregational Pathway to Partnership in the ARC**

The steps outlined below will lead a congregation into partnership in the ARC through a process of conversation and discernment. Congregations are received as ARC organizational partners at regularly scheduled board meetings upon recommendation from the ARC representative(s) that has worked through the process with the congregation. Following reception into the ARC, congregational representatives participate in a congregational commissioning at the next annual Partnership Covenant Gathering.

**A Journey of Conversation and Discernment**

1. An initial conversation is held between representatives of the Alliance of Reformed Church (ARC) and representatives of the congregation. Joint agreement from both parties continues the journey of conversation and discernment with a formal letter of invitation from the ARC.

2. Congregational leadership examines the following foundational statements of the ARC and adopts them with an officially recorded motion:
   - ARC Doctrinal Statements
     b. Reformed Confessions: Belgic Confession and Appendix – Belhar Confession; Heidelberg Catechism and Appendix – Great Lakes Catechism on Human Sexuality; Canons of Dort
   - ARC Organizational Convictions
   - ARC Strategic Priorities
   - ARC Relational Matrix
   - ARC Partnership Covenant Renewal Statement

   Suggested Motion:
   We, the [governing body] of ________________ Church endorse and embrace the foundational statements and relationships of the Alliance of Reformed Churches.

   The governing body completes the Congregational Request for Affiliation form (p. 11 of this packet) and Congregational Reflection form (p. 13) and submits them to the ARC.

3. In a letter, the governing body informs the congregation of its recommendation to join the Alliance of Reformed Churches and sets a date for a congregational meeting to which an ARC representative(s) is/are invited. Included with the letter to the congregation are the ARC Organizational Convictions and Strategic Priorities documents.

4. At the congregational meeting, the governing body explains its reasons for desiring to join the ARC. The ARC representatives explain the ARC Covenant Renewal approach to congregational partnership. The leadership body provides time for congregational discussion. The ARC representative(s) is available to answer questions, but more importantly to observe the health of the interactions between leadership and congregation.
5. After the meeting, the ARC representative(s) convene to consider their recommendation regarding the readiness of the congregation (its unity, understanding, and desire) to become a partner congregation in the ARC.

6. Upon receipt of a positive recommendation, the congregation takes official action to affiliate with the ARC, whether that is through congregational vote or governing body vote according to existing polity.

7. Upon receipt of the official congregational decision to affiliate, the ARC representative(s) provides his or her recommendation to the ARC Board.

8. The ARC Board acts upon the recommendation from its representative(s) at its next scheduled Board meeting.

9. The ARC Board provides a letter of reception to the congregation within 30 days.

10. The congregation agrees to have representatives attend the next annual Partnership Covenant Gathering to participate on behalf of their congregation in a congregational commissioning. This meeting, normally held in the summer, is a gathering in which we share, celebrate, learn and covenant with each other in our journey as the ARC.

11. The ARC representatives schedule a formal worship service of commissioning and reception at which pastors and elders/deacons signify their commitment by reading and signing the Covenant of the Ordained, and the congregation is commissioned as a partner in the ARC.
ORGANIZATIONAL CONVICTIONS

INTRODUCTORY CONVICTIONS
Denominations and other multi-congregational systems are tools given to the Church by the Spirit for the good of the Kingdom. In different seasons, they provide new and exciting modes of ministry for local communities of faith.

They are not, however, *Biblically mandated*. While unity is the hope of the global church (John 17) and of individual congregations (1 Corinthians 1, 12), and while covenants among believers are important (1 Samuel 20), structural adjustments to the ways that Christian communities interrelate are essential to health and mission (Acts 15).

With this in mind, we return to consider a number of essential questions in today’s climate:

*What role should an organization of churches serve?*
*What theology, history, polity, or calling should unite them?*
*How does covenant – a clear biblical value – inform relationships among churches?*

RELATIONAL CONVICTIONS (*Living Together in Christ*)
We are friends and partners in Christ, seeking first the Kingdom of God with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Unity in Jesus – our only hope for salvation – implies praying for one another, celebrating together, encouraging one another, and holding each other accountable.

We are unrelentingly innovative.
In order to remain relevant and engaged with a changing world, we will practice active listening, careful discernment, global attentiveness, and confident creativity in our lives and ministry.

We embrace the diversity of the human experience under obedience to Christ our King.
In doing so, we respond with compassion to the oppressed, we lead with justice in the face of injustice, and we seek in all situations to live out the presence of Christ in people’s lives.

THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS (*Renewing Reformed Theology*)

**Biblical Authority and Understanding**

- We affirm the Bible is the inspired, infallible, authoritative Word of God.
- We affirm that we are living within God’s redemptive-historical story that is constructed and governed by God’s covenants and promises.
- We affirm that understanding the Bible correctly requires use of consistent exegetical principles that include the grammatical/literary, historical, language, and theological dimensions.¹
- We affirm the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the author, who sits with us every time we open his best-selling book.

Reformed Confessional Theology

- We affirm the Apostles’, Athanasian, and Nicene Creeds as a member of the global Church.
- Because their doctrines align with our understanding of God’s Word, we affirm the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort as historic Reformed expressions of the Christian faith. These doctrinal standards help us to understand the Bible, direct the way we live in response to the gospel, and locate us within the larger body of Christ.
- We affirm the Belhar Confession as an appendix to the Belgic Confession so that the Belhar’s contemporary declaration of unity, justice, and equality is framed within the context of the Belgic’s view of humanity, Scripture, and God’s saving work through Jesus Christ. Founded on these Biblical truths, the Belhar Confession adds its prophetic call for unity and reconciliation to the Church’s witness to the world. Christ himself is our peace, tearing down the dividing wall of hostility among all peoples.
- We affirm the Great Lakes Catechism on Marriage and Sexuality as a confessional appendix to the Heidelberg Catechism so that its affirmations regarding human sexuality are read within the context of the Heidelberg Catechism’s teachings on sin, salvation, and service.
- We affirm that future confessional statements may be adopted as confessional addendums to the Heidelberg Catechism or the Belgic Confessions.

The Church

- We affirm that the church is a sent people, founded and inspired by the Holy Spirit.
- We affirm that the church is the heart of God’s mission for the world.
- We affirm that as a sent community, the church is called to multiply. From the earliest days of the church’s founding, groups of believers sent out planters to establish new communities of Christian faith where people’s lives were transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- We affirm the mission of multiplication as the core mission of every church and will prioritize our resources to continue planting new communities of Christian faith in our generation.

Personal Spiritual Maturity

- We affirm that the call of every relationship, person and leader is to live as a spirit-filled Christian who is growing in spiritual maturity (becoming more like Christ every day).
- We affirm that our primary family of faith is not our family of origin, but rather the body of Christ with whom we “are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.” (Ephesians 2:19-21).

Structural Convictions  

Empowering the Local Church by Shaping Agile Polity

Congregational Authority

An organization of churches exists to encourage, equip, and empower the local congregation. To that end, an organization of churches should always be working in a way that develops healthier missional congregations, limits its own ministry reach, and steps in only when there is no local option.
• Congregations will have full ownership and authority over their local property with the single exception that if a congregation closes, the future use of the property and its assets reverts to the organization.

• The core belief of the organization is that men and women are created in God’s image and are gifted by the Spirit to equip and lead God’s people for ministry.

• We maintain that there are two theologically acceptable positions regarding the interpretation of ordained offices. One position ordains women into the ordained offices of the church. The other limits the ordained offices in which women can serve. We respect each other and each other’s congregational choices regarding the nature of ordained leadership.

Theological Education – Pastoral Accountability
We are committed to theological education that is Biblical, Reformed, and that develops leaders who will “equip God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (Ephesians 4).

• The credentials of Congregational/Specialized Pastors, Commissioned Pastors and Teaching Elders will be granted, held, and supervised by a single ordained ministry oversight board for the purpose of professional/theological accountability.

• People who hold ordination will hold personal membership in a local congregation for the purpose of personal spiritual accountability.

Missional Partnerships
We are committed to local congregations as the primary place to enhance and grow missional effectiveness through local congregational partnerships and relationships.

• This requires the organization to equip, empower, and encourage congregations to find and develop healthy partnerships in ministry.

• There are seasons when congregations can be strengthened utilizing external trainers and coaches. The organization will develop transitional pastors, conflict resolution specialists, vocational coaches, and other ministry resource providers whose core outcome is to increase missional effectiveness in congregations.

Safe Congregations
We are committed to carrying out congregationally-based ministry in the context of emotional and physical safety.

• Congregations of the organization are accountable for utilizing training, policies, and safety procedures that will ensure safe ministry for all.

Organizational Limits
• Guiding Principles will be established for the organization, but the Guiding Principles will not be elevated to a standard of belief.

• Organizational funding will be limited to that needed for organizational leadership and for governing. The organization will intentionally limit its funding to those ministries initiated/identified for partnership support in conversation with collaborative and local congregations.
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. **Make disciples who follow Jesus.**
   We will equip collaboratives/classes and congregations to multiply disciples who are Christ-formed and gracious.

2. **Equip leaders for Kingdom work (personally, locally, regionally, and globally).**
   We will help collaboratives/classes and congregations identify, encourage, and equip servant leaders who lead people to follow Christ personally, in their communities, and throughout the world.

3. **Bring new ministries to life that share the gospel in their context.**
   We will encourage, equip, and empower collaboratives/classes and congregations to intentionally and continually multiply ministries that share the gospel with the people God has called them to reach, now and in the future.
## Alliance of Reformed Churches

### RELATIONAL MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding Boundaries</th>
<th>Economic Position Related to Ministry with Congregations</th>
<th>Insight Provided to Congregations</th>
<th>Relationship to Congregations</th>
<th>Organizational Dimension</th>
<th>Alliance</th>
<th>Organizational Commitments – Board Leadership</th>
<th>Collaborative</th>
<th>Network</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
<td>Funding limited to organizational and leadership development for governing. Limited ministry development funding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
<td>Primary budget planning and approval for co-laboring work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on the initial work of George Bullard*

### Alliance of Reformed Churches

Welcome Packet, June 2021
**Congregational Partnership Covenant Renewal Statement**

The Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC) is a covenanted community of congregations. We are formed around our covenant-keeping Triune God, the Word of God, the sacraments of grace given to the Church (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) and the reformed theology. As Reformed believers, we understand God’s Kingdom work, his individual calling of people, and his desire for Christian relationships in terms of covenant.

The ARC engages with its partner congregations through the language of covenant keeping and covenant renewal. In covenant keeping, we agree to be in relationship and conversation with each other in difficult and joyful times. In covenant renewal, we agree that covenants are between two parties for a period of time and in order to remain healthy should be renewed.

**The Covenant**

The ARC and its partner congregations covenant together to empower the mission of the local congregation as we together live into the ARC Organizational Convictions and Strategic Initiatives. We will do this with accountability, honesty, and integrity as children of God and His Church.

**Covenant Partnership**

The Covenant Partnership between the ARC and a partner congregation is overseen by collaborative/regional leadership on behalf of the Board of Directors (the “Board”). Healthy Covenant Partnerships require transparency of theological convictions, in addition to faithful witness and practice by both parties. As a result, there will be mutual conversations providing accountability and support:

- The collaborative/region will engage with congregations regarding their theology, ministry, and ministry impact.
- The congregation will engage with the collaborative/region regarding the effectiveness of its theology, equipping of congregations, and ministry impact.

**Covenant Partnership Renewal**

The ARC is an organization of affiliated congregations that regularly requires its partner congregations and collaborative/regions to discern together whether the congregation is being equipped by the ARC and whether the congregation desires to remain affiliated with the ARC.

**Partnership Term (5 years)**

A congregation partners with the ARC by engaging in the ARC Congregational Partnership Journey. Upon recommendation for approval from an ARC-appointed representative/collaborative group, the ARC Board acts to receive a congregation. The congregation then enters into five-year renewable terms of Covenant Partnership. During the 5th year of each term, the ARC designee or its collaborative/region engages the congregation in a conversation to determine whether the church remains theologically and missionally aligned with the ARC. This conversation is intended to be characterized by mutual encouragement and engagement. Upon conclusion of the conversation, the congregation and the collaborative/region must each arrive at their decision to recommend renewal of the Covenant Partnership for approval by the Board.
THE STATUS AND SUPPORT OF PASTORS

Final information regarding the status/transfer of pastors is still in development, and should be formally available in the next few months. The following principles, however, will be built into the pastoral construct:

1. There will be offices for both ministers and commissioned pastors.
2. All ordained pastors will be accountable to a single national Ministerial Oversight Team.
3. Collaboratives/regions will have general supervision over pastors, but formal oversight and credentialing will be vested in the national Ministerial Oversight Team.
4. Ministerial credentials will be valid for five-year terms. Ministers will engage in a renewal process every five years in which he/she will attest to their continuing theological alignment with the ARC, will report on learning/professional growth that has been taken place in the previous 5 years, and submit goals for future learning/professional growth in the next five years.
5. Whether a pastor is serving in a congregational or non-congregational setting, the pastor will identify a congregation where she/he considers themselves a “member.” This congregation will provide the pastor with personal spiritual accountability.

It is the intent of the ARC to have final principles in place by the time the first churches are ready to be received in order to provide for a smooth transition for pastors as well as congregations.

As the ARC develops, the Board will provide compensation guidelines for ordained staff that ARC congregations will commit to honor as part of their affiliation and renewal conversations. For example, these may include:

1. ARC congregations will provide competitive salaries as measured against comparable professions in the area of that congregation (i.e., school administrators, MSW administrative roles, public sector jobs that involve similar responsibilities, etc.).
2. ARC congregations will provide a minimum of 2X the annual salary in term life insurance.
3. ARC congregations will make an annual contribution of 11% of compensation (salary + housing) to the individual retirement account of the pastor.
4. ARC congregations will provide both short-term and long-term disability plans.

Conversations like these are ongoing between the board and staff of the ARC as it develops. In this area, we also ask for your best thoughts about how to establish boundaries without binding congregations.
The ________________________________ Church [legal name of church] requests permission to affiliate with the Alliance of Reformed Churches. By making this request, we acknowledge that it is our desire to affiliate with likeminded congregations as partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We also acknowledge the responsibilities that are required as we journey forward in our common faith, life, and mission in Jesus Christ. These include active involvement in a Missional Network, engagement with and support of the Collaborative with which we are affiliated, submission to the Ministerial Oversight Team, and financial support of the governance and leadership of the ARC.

We passed the following motion at our [governing body] meeting on _____________ [date]:

We, the [governing body] of _________________________ Church endorse and embrace the foundational statements of the Alliance of Reformed Churches. [Attach minutes]

We have reviewed the Congregational Pathway to Partnership Journey document and fully commit to a process that will allow our congregation and representatives of the ARC to be engaged in the pathway together so that we might affiliate with the ARC.

Chairperson Signature: ________________________________ Date: ______________

Pastor Signature: __________________________________________ Date: ______________

Elders: ________________________________ Deacons: ________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Mailing Address of Church:

Street: ______________________________________________________________________

City: ____________________________ State/Prov: ____________ Zip: ____________
This is to certify that the Alliance of Reformed Churches received this application and began conversations with __________________________ Church seeking affiliation on ______________________ [date].

ARC Representative Signature: __________________________________________

Date: ______________________
CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE

TO ACCOMPANY THE REQUEST FOR AFFILIATION WITH THE ARC

Church Name: __________________________________________

Location (City and State): ______________________________________

Number of people attending weekend worship: __________

Number of members age 21 and younger: __________

Number of members age 22 and older: __________

Please provide brief replies (1-2 paragraphs) to the following items (attaching or pasting from existing documents is fine). We would prefer this as an electronic document.

• Description of your leadership structure (Pastors, Staff, Elders & Deacons, etc.).
• Description of the community you are called to serve and reach.
• Description of your congregational journey in the last 2 decades (growth, transition, decline, impacting events, etc.).
• What effective ministries is the church currently providing that impact people’s lives and how do you determine the impact of those ministries?
• Share one story of God’s blessing on your ministry.
• Description of the facility including indebtedness and/or planned development.

What value do you see in being an affiliated congregation with the ARC?

What gift(s) (ministry focus, location, etc.) can you contribute to ARC?

What do you hope the ARC brings to your ministry?

Printed name(s) of person(s) submitting congregational responses:

_________________________________________  ______________________________________

Date Submitted: ______________

ARC Representative: __________________________________________

Date Received: ______________