Rules for Synods of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia

as adopted by Synod 1998, Acts Article 65, and amended in accordance with Article 42 of Acts 2000, Articles 12, 90, and 91 of Acts 2003, Articles 75, 90, and 117 of Acts 2012, Article 16 of Acts 2018 and Article 114 of Acts 2021.

1. CONVENING CHURCH

Every synod shall appoint a church to convene the next synod. The tasks of the convening church are:

1.1. Give at least six months' written notice to all the churches and all synodical deputyships of synod's meeting place, commencement, date and time.

This notification shall further:

a. invite the churches to submit by a date four months prior to the commencement of synod, any new items of business for inclusion on the Provisional Draft Agenda;

b. invite the churches to submit, by a date three weeks prior to the commencement of synod, any other material for inclusion on the Final Draft Agenda;

c. invite the deputyships to submit their reports for inclusion on the Provisional Draft Agenda;

d. invite the treasurer and auditing Church to submit their reports three months prior to the commencement of Synod; and

e. state the postal address for receipt of submissions.

1.2. Receive all material submitted, clearly date mark each item, and place it on the Draft Agenda, listing the order of business as follows – or as near thereto as practicable:

a. Opening by the Convening Church

b. Signing of the Attendance List and Examination of Credentials

c. Election of Officers

d. Constitution of Synod

e. Delegates' agreement with the Three Forms of Unity

f. Adoption of the Agenda

g. Adoption of Meeting Procedures

h. Incoming Correspondence

i. Instructions

j. Reports by Classes

k. Reports of Deputies and discharge of Deputies

l. Audit of the books of the Treasurer and discharge of Treasurer

m. Calculation of the percentages of the churches' share of synod costs

n. Appointment of Deputies

o. Appointment of Convening Church, and place and time of the next Synod

p. Personal questions

q. Adoption of Acts

r. Approval of Press Release

s. Closing of Synod

1.3. After the closing date for the Provisional Draft Agenda, provide each of the churches access to an electronic copy of the document at least three months before synod commences.

1.4. As soon as classes have appointed delegates to Synod:

a. provide each of the delegates and each of the alternates access to an electronic copy of the Provisional Draft Agenda;

b. provide one unbound and unfolded printed copy to each of the delegates and alternates who desire one; and

c. as further material becomes available, provide access to an electronic copy to each of the delegates and alternates.

1.5. After the closing date for the Final Draft Agenda:

a. provide each of the churches, with minimum delay, access to electronic copies of the Final Draft Agenda, together with access to electronic copy of all material received after the closing date for the Provisional Draft Agenda; and

b. provide one unbound and unfolded printed copy to each of the delegates and alternates who desire one.

Confidential matters must be provided to delegates and alternates only.

1.6. Arrange meeting accommodation for synod and its committees; any necessary sound amplification; all administrative support facilities; and refreshments and meals. Also, recommend to Synod a qualified administrative assistant to the Clerk (see Rule 3.2).

1.7. Prepare and submit to synod a recommendation for the appointment of the next convening church. Here the convening church shall seek to improve the rotation between the different geographic areas in which the churches are located, provided however that over an extended period of time the churches shall still have equal turns in convening and hosting synod.

1.8. At the opening of synod, place on synod's table one bound copy of the Final Draft Agenda together with loose inserts of copies of all items received after its closing date, open synod in a Christian manner; examine the credentials of the delegates and report its findings; conduct the election of synod's officers; hand over control to the elected chairman; and inform him on what other arrangements have been made for the conduct of synod.

1.9. The convening church shall:

a. submit to the treasurer (wherever possible) all invoices and receipts of expenditure for which they are claiming reimbursement

b. only authorize expenditure for payment or reimbursement that relates to their mandate in the preparations for synod

Note: In the case of an extra-ordinary synod, the times and conditions specified in this section shall, to the extent that it is practical to do so, be observed.

2. DELEGATES

In choosing delegates for synod, the minor assemblies shall observe the following rules:

2.1. An elder may be appointed if no minister is available; and a deacon may be appointed if no elder is available.

2.2. Every classis shall delegate three ministers and three elders. These delegates shall be chosen from as many different churches as possible.

3. OFFICERS OF SYNOD

3.1. Synod shall elect a chairman, a vice-chairman, a first clerk, and a second clerk, who collectively shall be known as the officers of synod.

3.2. The vice-chairman shall assist the other officers of synod where needed and shall prepare the Press Release of synod.

The first clerk shall be responsible for the preparation of the Acts of Synod. He shall have responsibility for Synod's administration facilities and ensure the timely distribution of materials to the delegates. An assistant recommended by the convening church (see Rules 1.6) shall be appointed to record the Acts of Synod during the open sessions. At the conclusion of Synod he shall be responsible for printing and distributing these Acts.

The second clerk shall prepare all outward correspondence. He shall forward all material submitted to Synod, all correspondence, reports, available speeches, as well as all outgoing correspondence, in hardcopy and softcopy format, appropriately indexed for the Synod Archivist.

3.3. Every synod shall decide whether its chairman and first clerk will be appointed to an advisory committee.

3.4. The officers of synod shall prepare and submit written proposals on:

a. the number and composition of advisory committees, subject to the provisions of Rule 4 of the *Rules for Synods*; the nominations for committee chairman, and the agenda items to be dealt with by each committee;

b. the attendance and participation of any adviser or visitor, subject to the provisions of Rules 5 and 6 of the *Rules for Synods*;

c. the time schedules for meeting;

d. the order in which the agenda items shall be dealt with;

e. nominations for deputies' appointments.

4. ADVISORY COMMITTEES

4.1. A committee shall have from three to five members and be chaired by the person appointed by synod.

4.2. Unless it has good grounds to believe that a matter can be finalised by a straightforward recommendation, a committee shall submit a written report for consideration by synod. In the case of a substantial matter a committee may first distribute to synod's delegates a provisional report with draft conclusions and recommendations, with the request for written comments by a certain date and time, and thereafter submit a final report to synod.

5. ADVISERS

5.1. Synod may resolve to admit for the purpose of giving advice, to a full session or advisory committee, any minister from the bond of churches who has not been delegated to synod, as well as any communicant member from the bond of churches with particular skills or expertise required by synod.

An adviser shall confine his activities in the meeting to giving advice only at the request from the chairman. He shall vacate his place in the meeting after having concluded his advice, and the meeting shall not commence debate until the adviser has done so.

6. VISITORS

Synod shall recognise visitors from other churches, and grant privileges accordingly, as follows:

6.1. Delegates from sister churches will be allowed to address synod in open session for the purpose of passing on greetings and information concerning the particular sister relation; and sit as advisory members in synod's open sessions and advisory committees where they may give advice when they request, or are requested, to do so.

6.2. Delegates from churches with whom we have temporary ecclesiastical contact will be allowed to address synod in open session for the purpose of passing on greetings and information concerning the temporary ecclesiastical contact; to speak in synod's open session when they request, or are requested, to do so on matters specifically pertaining to the temporary ecclesiastical contact; and to sit as advisory members in the advisory committee(s) that deal with the temporary ecclesiastical contact, where they may give advice when they request, or are requested, to do so.

6.3. Delegates from churches with whom we have official contact will be allowed to address synod in open session for the purpose of passing on greetings and information concerning the contact.

6.4. Delegates from churches who desire to establish contact with our churches will be allowed admission to the audience of synod.

All delegates so received will be offered normal Christian hospitality, such as lodging and meals.

6.5. Visitors delegated by other churches must be male in order to be accorded the privileges outlines in Rules 6.1 through 6.4.

7. GENERAL PROCEDURES

7.1. After synod has been constituted the chairman shall request the delegates and any advisers then present to rise; and by that action those rising shall be held to reaffirm their agreement with the Word of God and the Confessions. This reaffirmation shall also be required from any person attending for the first time as substitute for another delegate.

7.2. In adopting its Agenda, synod shall examine the status of each item that was not included in the Provisional Draft Agenda; and any such item that is found to contain new matter(s) - this being an item that should have been in the hands of the churches three months prior to the commencement of synod - shall not be taken into consideration by synod.

Synod shall not add any item to the Final Draft Agenda except by special resolution and then only on the grounds of exceptional circumstances.

The Final Draft Agenda as adopted shall become synod's Agenda, to which nothing shall be added.

7.3. The admissibility of an agenda item shall be decided at the time when the item is scheduled for consideration. Submissions not from the churches, except those allowed by the Church Order, shall be received for information only and require no acknowledgment.

All proposals (from the churches and including those of deputies) that are admissible must be tabled and decided upon.

7.4. Members of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, or of any of its sister churches, shall have the right of admission to the audience of all open sessions.

7.5. The daily closing of synod with prayer shall be by synod's members in alphabetical order of surnames.

7.6. Other than in matters of personal nature, or when otherwise decided by special resolution, synod shall not meet in closed session. Admission to a closed session shall normally be restricted to synod members.

7.7. Synod members shall have free access to any advisory committee's meeting but not speak except at the invitation of the chairman, and then only in an advisory capacity.

The admissibility of proposals must be decided upon with appropriate grounds and recorded in the Acts.

7.8. The Acts of the proceedings of each day shall if possible be presented for adoption at the beginning of the following sitting day.

They shall record all matters of substance under the headings MATERIAL (and ADMISSIBILITY, if applicable), DECISION(S) and GROUNDS. Proposals declared in the affirmative shall be recorded as ADOPTED. Proposals declared in the negative shall be recorded as DEFEATED.

They shall not record any details of the vote or ballot, nor any names of the movers and seconders of proposals, motions and amendments.

Under the heading MATERIAL, the Acts shall also summarise the material considered.

8. RULES FOR DEBATE

8.1. Any discussion relating to the introduction of a proposal or motion shall be kept to a minimum and be restricted to procedure and matter-of-fact issues. It shall not include argumentation in support of, or in opposition to, the substance of a proposal or motion except in the wording or the framing thereof.

8.2. No proposal, motion or amendment shall be debated, put to the vote or adopted unless it has been seconded; provided however that the chairman, upon a proposal or motion being moved, may ask the meeting if any delegate opposes it.

If no delegate registers opposition the chairman may declare the proposal or motion carried without debate and without taking a vote.

8.3. A delegate wishing to submit an original proposal, motion or amendment shall, if required by the chairman, put the proposal, motion or amendment in writing.

8.4. Synod may decide to conduct debate on a particular matter in more than one round. In this situation the provisions of these Rules shall apply to each round, provided however that

a. in the first round a speaker shall not interact with earlier speakers in that round;

b. in the second and following rounds a speaker shall not repeat what he said in earlier rounds;

c. in the final round no new matters shall be brought up.

8.5. No speaker shall speak more than once in each round of the debate on the same question, except by way of explanation, or in reply upon any original proposal or motion of which he was the mover, or in reply as the mover of any amendment then before the chair.

8.6. A speaker shall at all times address the chairman.

8.7. Any delegate may, by way of raising a point of order, direct the attention of the chairman to any infraction of the Rules for Debate.

8.8. A speaker shall not be interrupted except on a point of order, in which event he shall refrain from speaking until the point of order has been heard and decided.

8.9. A delegate who was the mover of a proposal, motion or amendment shall, at the conclusion of the speeches of all the other delegates who chose to speak on the matter, have the right of reply. A delegate speaking in reply shall not introduce any new matter but shall strictly confine himself to answering previous speakers.

8.10. The following motion may be received when a proposal (or motion) is being debated: "That the proposal (or motion) be amended". In this situation attention must be given to the following points:

a. every amendment shall be relevant to the proposal or motion on which it is moved and must substantially support the nature and intent of that proposal or motion.

b. only one amendment shall be discussed at a time. As often as an amendment is defeated, another amendment may be moved before the original motion is put to the vote.

c. in speaking to an amendment a speaker may give notice of his intention to move a further amendment.

d. where an amendment is adopted, the original motion as amended shall for all purposes of subsequent debate be treated as an original motion.

9. VOTING

9.1. When to vote

Wherever possible, decisions shall be made unanimously; and on matters of principle the chairman shall call for a vote only after every reasonable effort to obtain a consensus has been made.

9.2. How to vote

In taking the vote on any proposal, motion or amendment, the chairman shall ask those in favour to indicate such by show of hands; and he may do so as often as is necessary to enable him to form and declare his opinion as to whether the affirmative or negative has the majority.

9.3. Declaring the result of a vote

A motion or proposal shall be declared 'adopted' by simple majority vote. If the number of votes in favour is equal to the number of votes against, the proposal or motion shall be declared 'defeated'.

9.4. Voting on persons

Questions concerning persons, except on appointments proposed by the officers with the prior consent of synod, shall be decided by secret ballot.

9.5. Counting Rules

a. Ballot papers incorrectly filled in and ballot papers left blank shall be declared invalid.

b. Those who receive the largest number of votes shall be declared elected, provided that this number is not less than one-half of the number of valid votes cast.

c. If there is no result after two free ballots, any subsequent choice shall be restricted to the candidates who received the most votes in the previous ballot. If a ballot results in a tied vote another ballot shall be conducted, and if this results in a further tied vote the decision shall be made by lot after calling upon the Name of the LORD.

10. DEPUTIES

Synod shall appoint its deputies in closed session and provide them with clearly defined written instructions to which deputies shall strictly adhere. Deputies shall submit a written report on their activities. Unless otherwise instructed, they shall submit their report in time for inclusion in the Provisional Draft Agenda.

If a supplementary report is found necessary, it shall present only relevant information that has come to notice after the closing date for the Provisional Draft Agenda. Deputies must make available at synod for referral and consultation, copies of all correspondence, minutes, and records of other work done. They should also submit to the Archives all materials that are deemed relevant to be stored for future reference.

11. TREASURER and FINANCE

11.1. Every Synod shall appoint (at least) 2 delegates for the duration of Synod to form the Financial Advisory Committee with the following mandate:

a. monitor the draft budget as the Synod proceeds by including any impacts of Synod's decisions,

b. after necessary amendments, present the draft budget, including cost sharing arrangements, to Synod,

c. liaise with the Synod Treasurer as necessary, and

d. present recommendations to Synod based on the Treasury and Audit Reports.

11.2. The Synod Treasurer shall:

a. be responsible for the synod finances as approved by the Synod;

b. send accounts to the churches for their contribution to treasury funds in accordance with the cost sharing arrangements approved by Synod. Churches shall be invoiced once per year during the period between Synods;

c. collect and bank the monies received from the churches;

d. pay all accounts that have been properly documented and authorized by the convening church; Synod Deputies and Delegates (authorized by Classes) including:

   i. reimbursement of loss of income claimed by Deputies or Delegates at the rate approved by Synod; and

   ii. reimbursement of vehicle travel costs based on the rate approved by Synod;

e. keep Synod funds in interest bearing saving account(s) and/or cheque accounts and invest any temporary surplus funds in an authorised trustee investment or banking institution; keep account records, setting out accurately all disbursements and receipts and balances of funds held;

f. submit records of accounts to the Synod Treasury Auditors;

g. when requested by Deputies, provide Deputies with a statement showing progressive expenditure against their budget allocation;

h. draw up a draft budget of estimated expenditure for the next Synod by:

   i. estimating the expenditure for Synod delegates to travel to Synod, any loss of income and any likely incidentals expenditure;

   ii. requesting the Deputies to provide an estimate of expenditure for the next Synod period at least 2 months before Synod;

   iii. requesting the convening church to provide an estimate of the cost to host the Synod at least 2 months before Synod commences. The Treasurer can provide assistance in determining estimates based on previous Synods;

   iv. using previous expenditure details to estimate future expenditure;

   v. recommending a rate of reimbursement for claims for loss of income by Deputies and Delegates, based on the rate adopted by previous Synods and adjusted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Consumer Price Index for All Groups for the previous Synod period. (See: http://www.abs.qov.au/AU5STATSIabs@nsf/Latestproducts/64O1.OMain%20Features6Dec%202008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6401.0&issue=Dec%202008&num=&view=); and

   vi. recommending a rate for reimbursement of vehicle travel costs;

   vii. including an allowance in the budget to cover the cost of the next Synod in order to have funds available to pay for the next Synod;

i. draw up a draft cost sharing arrangement. Cost sharing shall be based on a total annual contribution by all the Churches which is equal to the total budget divided by the number of Years between Synods. Each Church will be invoiced a percentage of the annual contribution based on the number of confessing members of that church as recorded in the Church Yearbook(s) for that year. When a new church is instituted part of the way through a year, costs shall be proportioned pro rata between the new Church and the “mother” Church; and

j. submit the draft budget to the convening Church one month before the commencement of Synod.

11.3. The deputies shall:

a. only incur expenses which are for matters included in their mandate; in the event of increased costs which would impact on their mandate, deputies shall submit the request to the treasurer with substantiation;

b. inform treasurer of upcoming large expenses at least one month before they occur.

c. When making a claim, deputies shall:

i. submit to the treasurer (wherever possible) all invoices and receipts of expenditure for which they are claiming reimbursement,

ii. when claiming loss of income shall submit the request including the dates for which the claim is made,

iii. obtain verification from fellow deputies to affirm the legitimacy of all expenses;

d. inform the Treasurer of budget items for the next three years, and to do so six months prior to the commencement of the next synod

11.4. The synod delegates:

a. shall submit to the treasurer (wherever possible) all invoices and receipts of expenditure for which they are claiming reimbursement; and

b. when claiming loss of income, shall submit the request to the Treasurer including the dates for which the claim is made.

11.5. Upon receipt and adoption of a satisfactory audit report, synod shall discharge the treasurer.

12. RULES FOR SYNODS

a. These *Rules for Synods* are the rules by which the Synods of The Free Reformed Churches of Australia are conducted. They shall not be changed except by adoption in Synod of a proposal submitted by one of the churches.

b. If any provision in these *Rules for Synods* is found to conflict with the Church Order, the latter shall prevail.