

What Is the Reformed Baptist Network?

The Reformed Baptist Network is a new effort among Reformed Baptists seeking to organize together for the cause of Christ, church planting and missions. The Network is being formed from a number of long-standing 1689 Confessional churches, but seeking an Association with a fresh vision and focus, desiring to express a broad Reformed and Gospel-centered communion. RBNet wants to affirm fellowship and relationship with other associations and fellowships, and pursue fraternal connections as much as possible. Yet RBNetwork also has a distinct *missionary vision, organizational structure, and Confessional commitment*.

Missionary Vision

RBNet's vision is "to glorify God through fellowship and cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission to the ends of the earth." RBNet aims to have a zealous commitment to the spread of the Gospel of the kingdom as the center of our fellowship and cooperation. Baptist churches have long believed in the sufficiency and autonomy of the local church (and the mission of the local church), but also believe that Baptist churches should cooperate together for greater kingdom usefulness. We believe in the importance of fellowship between churches, but fellowship is enriched and strengthened when there is a greater purpose and direction binding us together. For RBNet, that purpose is the glory of God in the spread of the Gospel to all nations.

Therefore, RBNet is *strategically organized* for missions and church planting. The Network will formally endorse and service missionaries, support missionaries, indigenous pastors, and church planters sent / sponsored by member churches. The Network will also receive and provide fellowship for 'endorsed' or 'associate' missionaries working with other groups. We see God working through his churches to build his kingdom in an incredible *variety* of ways and places, and with varied needs. The Network hopes to be able to encourage and support the variety of work God is doing among Reformed Baptists and among those who are in various stages of reformation.

Organizational Structure

RBNet is designed with a distinct organizational structure - a focused commitment to preserve, protect and honor local church authority. RBNet aims to be a Network of *churches*, with the authority residing in the member churches, minimizing bureaucracy and the authority of committees. Freedom of communication and transparency between churches is encouraged and even required.

RBNet will have four standing committees: a General Assembly Planning Committee, a Membership Committee, a Finance and Personnel Committee, and a Missions Committee. The

deliberations of these committees will be open and public, as much as possible. The committees have no power to restrict the communications or motions of member churches. All major decisions will be handled among the member churches.

In addition, RBNet allows for two levels of membership. Full member churches are churches that are recognized by the Network, that subscribe to the 1689 Confession (see below), and have full voting rights. Associate membership will also be open to churches and/or individuals who are recognized by the Network and who subscribe to an Associate Membership statement of faith.

Confessional Commitment

Finally, RBNet has a distinct Confessional commitment. We are churches that are Reformed and Baptist in our theology and ecclesiology, believing that the church grows best from a robust theological unity and vision. Therefore, we believe in a robust Confessionalism, a strong adherence to the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. The convictions it expresses are key to partnership in evangelism, discipleship, church polity, and other Great Commission objectives.

However, we also recognize that Confessional subscription is no guarantee of true unity. True unity also involves the cultivation of healthy relationships, mutual trust, and laboring together in love for common kingdom objectives. Our methodology of subscription must be careful not to undermine such trust, stifle honesty about differences, or undermine a willingness to work through differences biblically.¹

For the last half-century, the 1689 Confession has been published with a prologue that includes this quote from Charles Spurgeon: This Confession is “not issued as an authoritative rule, or

¹ Samuel Miller, who was a strong proponent of Confessional Subscription, also wrote, If “absolute uniformity in the mode of explaining every minute detail of truth be contended for; if men are to be accused and subjected to discipline for not expounding every doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith, in the same precise manner with every other subscriber who has gone before him – the Church must inevitably be kept in a state of constant mutual accusation and conflict. Quietness and peace will be out of the question.” - Letter from Samuel Miller, cited in *The Presbyterian Journal*, 17 August 1960.

Consider also John Murray’s warning: “It seems to the present writer that to demand acceptance of every proposition in so extensive a series of documents would be incompatible with the avowal made in answer to the first question in the formula of subscription and comes dangerously close to the error of placing human documents on par with holy Scripture. Furthermore, the commitment of oneself to every proposition as the condition of exercising office in the Church is hardly consistent with the liberty of judgment on certain points of doctrine which has been characteristic of the Reformed Churches.” Cited in J. V. Fesko, “The Legacy of Old School Confession Subscription in the OPC,” *JETS* 46/4 (December 2003): 673-98.

The late Reformed Baptist missions coordinator, David Straub, wrote, A legal approach to the Confession “will take attention away from the spirit and glory of these truths, and bring attention to the technical outworking of them in a pre-approved manner... There must be ample room for a church to “interpret” the Confession and work it out in her own context.”

code of faith, whereby you are to be fettered, but as an assistance to you in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness.”

In this spirit, RBNet requires *substantial subscription* to the Confession of Faith for member churches. Substantial subscription is defined as “confession of the doctrines expressed in each chapter of the confession yet with liberty and charity over minor matters of wording, application and nuance not essential to those doctrines as a whole.”

This missionary vision, organizational structure and Confessional commitment are what set apart the Reformed Baptist Network.

“To God be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and forever.”