

# Protestant Church in Switzerland (PCS) – New Constitution

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**Preamble**

The Protestant Reformed Church in Switzerland (PCS) confesses God as the Creator, Jesus Christ as Redeemer and its sole Head, and the Holy Spirit as Comforter and Succor.<sup>1</sup>

It recognizes the witness of divine revelation in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

It confesses that we are saved by grace and justified by faith.

**I. Foundations****§ 1 Communion of churches**

The Protestant Reformed Church of Switzerland (PCS) is the communion of Protestant Reformed and other Protestant churches in Switzerland.

**§ 2 Mission**

<sup>1</sup> The PCS proclaims the Gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed.

<sup>2</sup> It proclaims through word and sacrament, diakonia and pastoral care, edification and education.

<sup>3</sup> It gathers people for prayer and services.

<sup>4</sup> It witnesses and invites to discipleship.

<sup>5</sup> It fulfills its social mission and is committed to justice, peace and the preservation of creation.

<sup>6</sup> It contributes to peace among religions.

<sup>7</sup> It is committed to understanding and respect among the members of different religious communities and the preservation of religious freedom.

<sup>8</sup> It invites all people to reconciled communion regardless of social or cultural background.

**§ 3 Origin and Witness**

<sup>1</sup> The PCS shares with all of Christendom the faith as it was formulated in the creeds of the ancient church.

<sup>2</sup> It is rooted in the Reformation and respects the Reformation confessions of faith. It continues the Reformation.

<sup>3</sup> It expresses the Christian faith in a contemporary way.

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<sup>1</sup> In the German language, God can be called Creator and Creatress, and the Holy Spirit Comforter and Comfortress.

**§ 4 Unity in diversity**

- <sup>1</sup> The PCS lives on the three levels of parish, member church and communion of churches.
- <sup>2</sup> It is part of the one, holy, universal and apostolic church.
- <sup>3</sup> It cooperates with other churches and Christian communities. Together with them, it strives for a credible Christian witness in society.
- <sup>4</sup> It connects itself and its member churches with Christianity world-wide, among other things as member of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE), the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

**§ 5 Being church together**

- <sup>1</sup> The PCS and the member churches support each other in fulfilling their tasks, and work together.
- <sup>2</sup> They owe each other consideration and assistance.
- <sup>3</sup> The PCS shall involve the member churches in its work.
- <sup>4</sup> The PCS and the member churches shall respect the principle of subsidiarity. According to this principle, the communion of churches shall undertake tasks only if they cannot be handled at the level of the member churches or their associations.
- <sup>5</sup> Individual member churches of the PCS may undertake tasks on behalf of the PCS.

**II. Duties****§ 6 Duties within the church**

- <sup>1</sup> The PCS shall contribute to cohesion among the member churches.
- <sup>2</sup> It shall contribute to good relations among the member churches by providing suggestions for church life and for fulfilling the church's mission.
- <sup>3</sup> It provides theological and ethical groundwork for member churches on topics dealing with the church, society, politics, culture, science and the economy, and prepares statements.
- <sup>4</sup> It fosters spiritual life at the level of the communion of churches.

**§ 7 External relations**

- <sup>1</sup> The PCS maintains ecumenical relations at the national

and international levels. It serves church unity in diversity.

<sup>2</sup> It cultivates Jewish-Christian and interreligious dialogue at the national and international levels.

<sup>3</sup> It maintains relations with the authorities of the Swiss Confederation. In doing so, it represents the concerns of its member churches.

<sup>4</sup> It maintains relations with politicians and civil society at the national and international levels.

<sup>5</sup> The member churches are responsible for the aforementioned relations at the cantonal and municipal levels.

### **§ 8 Church ministries and missionary organizations**

<sup>1</sup> The PCS is committed to its church ministries and missionary organizations.

<sup>2</sup> Swiss Church Aid (HEKS) and Bread for All (BFA) are foundations of the PCS.

<sup>3</sup> The PCS recognizes Mission 21 and “DM – échange et mission” as their missionary ministries in Switzerland.

## **III. General Provisions**

### **§ 9 Registered office and bodies**

<sup>1</sup> The PCS is an association within the meaning of Art. 60 ff. of the Swiss Civil Code. It has its registered office in Bern.

<sup>2</sup> Its bodies, in accordance with association law, are:  
a. the Synod,  
b. the Council, and  
c. the Audit Office.

### **§ 10 Principle of non-discrimination**

In all its activities, the PCS takes care that no one is discriminated in either word or deed.

### **§ 11 Equal opportunities**

<sup>1</sup> The PCS promotes gender equality.

<sup>2</sup> It promotes a balanced representation of the sexes in its bodies.

### **§ 12 Languages**

<sup>1</sup> The PCS takes care to ensure a balanced representation of the national languages in its bodies.

<sup>2</sup> The documents of the PCS are published in German and French. Fundamental documents are translated as needed into Italian and Romansh.

#### **IV. Membership**

##### **§ 13 Composition**

PCS member churches are the Reformed and other Protestant churches of Switzerland listed in the Annex.

##### **§ 14 Admission**

<sup>1</sup> The Synod can admit a church as a member church, provided that it:

- a. recognizes this constitution together with its preamble;
- b. is organized as a legal entity;
- c. is neither affiliated with a member church of the PCS nor belongs to a synodal association that is a member of the PCS.

<sup>2</sup> The admission of a church requires the approval of two-thirds of the members of the Synod who are present.

##### **§ 15 Withdrawal**

<sup>1</sup> Each member church can withdraw from the PCS at the end of a year, provided that it observes a nine-month notice period.

<sup>2</sup> The notice of withdrawal must be addressed to the Synod.

##### **§ 16 Exclusion**

<sup>1</sup> A member church can be excluded if it infringes on fundamental interests of the PCS.

<sup>2</sup> The Synod decides on the exclusion of a church. Decisions on exclusion require the approval of two-thirds of the members of the Synod who are present.

#### **V. Leadership of the PCS**

##### **§ 17 Tripartite leadership of the PCS**

<sup>1</sup> The PCS is governed in a synodal, collegial and personal manner by the Synod, the Council and the President of the PCS.

<sup>2</sup> The Synod, the Council and the President of the PCS shall be committed to the mission of the PCS in all their

actions.

<sup>3</sup> The Synod, the Council and the President of the PCS promote the spiritual life of the PCS.

<sup>4</sup> The decisions taken by the Synod of the PCS are binding for the member churches. The regulations of individual member churches are left to their discretion.

## **A. Synod**

### **§ 18 General provisions**

<sup>1</sup> The Synod is the supreme governing body of the PCS.

<sup>2</sup> In the Synod, church worship and the cultivation of fellowship are given their due place.

<sup>3</sup> New members of the Synod are installed in a synodal church service. At the beginning of their first Synod they take an oath of office.

<sup>4</sup> The regulations of the Synod shall govern the functioning and procedures of its bodies, within the framework of this constitution.

### **§ 19 Composition**

<sup>1</sup> The Synod is comprised of Synod members who are delegated by their member churches for the term of office determined by them.

<sup>2</sup> The number of Synod members of a member church is determined by the number of its members at the end of the year preceding the general elections of the Council:

- a. Up to 5,000 members: one Synod member;
- b. Up to 50,000 members: two Synod members;
- c. For every further 50,000 members or part thereof: one additional Synod member.

<sup>3</sup> Staff of the PCS offices and foundations in which the Synod or Council are governing bodies cannot be Synod members.

### **§ 20 Synod presidium**

<sup>1</sup> The Synod elects from its midst – by secret ballot – a presidium comprised of a Synod president and two Synod vice-presidents. They must belong to different member churches.

<sup>2</sup> The Synod president convenes the Synod and presides over the assembly.

### **§ 21 Competence**

## The Synod

- a. decides on the adoption of
  - rules and regulations for the Synod,
  - financial rules and regulations,
  - other regulations, provided that the matter to be regulated does not fall within the competence of the Council;
- b. assigns tasks to the Council and handles proposals presented to it by the Council;
- c. formulates suggestions for church life and fulfilling the church's mission;
- d. determines the PCS's areas of action;
- e. takes note of the Council's legislative objectives;
- f. elects by secret ballot the President of the PCS for a four-year term of office;
- g. elects by secret ballot the remaining members of the Council for a four-year term of office;
- h. establishes conferences;
- i. establishes the Audit Committee and the Nomination Committee and elects their members;
- j. establishes other committees and elects their members;
- k. appoints the Audit Office;
- l. approves the minutes of the last Synod;
- m. approves the Council's annual report;
- n. approves the financial reports and decides on the budget;
- o. discharges the Council from liability for their handling of affairs;
- p. decides on the revision of the constitution.

### **§ 22 Voting rights**

- <sup>1</sup> Every member of the Synod has one vote.
- <sup>2</sup> The Synod has a quorum if the majority of its members are present.
- <sup>3</sup> When voting, the simple majority of votes cast shall decide, unless this constitution or the regulations of the Synod specify a qualified majority.
- <sup>4</sup> The members of the Council have an advisory role in the Synod.

### **§ 23 Audit committee**

- <sup>1</sup> The audit committee is comprised of five members of the Synod, who must belong to different member churches.
- <sup>2</sup> It is responsible for preliminary consultations on

documents to be submitted to the Synod.

<sup>3</sup> It reviews the annual report, the budget and the annual financial statements.

<sup>4</sup> It reviews the Council's performance of its duties. It can request information from the Council at any time.

#### **§ 24 Nomination committee**

<sup>1</sup> The nomination committee is comprised of three members of the Synod, who must belong to different churches.

<sup>2</sup> It prepares nominations for elections in the Synod, in cooperation with member churches and in consultation with the Synod presidium.

#### **§ 25 Conferences**

<sup>1</sup> The Synod may establish conferences for an indefinite or predetermined period of time.

<sup>2</sup> A conference is a place for cooperation between the PCS, its member churches, and other ministries and organizations on a specific topic.

<sup>3</sup> In the Synod, each conference fulfills a consultative role and possesses the right of petition.

<sup>4</sup> The Synod shall determine the organization and procedures of conferences in a set of regulations.

### **B. The Council**

#### **§ 26 General provisions**

<sup>1</sup> The Council is the governing and executive body of the PCS.

<sup>2</sup> The members of the Council are installed by the Synod presidium at a synodal worship service. At the beginning of their first Synod, they take an oath of office.

<sup>3</sup> Within the framework of this constitution, the Council shall determine its working methods and procedures in a set of regulations.

#### **§ 27 Composition**

<sup>1</sup> The Council is comprised of seven members, including the President of the PCS.

<sup>2</sup> Members of the Council can be re-elected twice.

<sup>3</sup> Members who have reached the age of 70 shall leave the Council at the end of the respective calendar year.

<sup>4</sup> In the Council, the ordained and non-ordained, the sexes and language regions shall be adequately

represented.

<sup>5</sup> Members of the Council shall not simultaneously be members of the Synod.

<sup>6</sup> The Council appoints two Vice Chairpersons and is otherwise constituted within the framework of this constitution.

### **§ 28 Competence**

The Council

- a. determines the aims and means of its activities;
- b. makes proposals to the Synod, implements the resolutions of the Synod and assumes day-to-day management;
- c. represents the PCS at the national and international levels;
- d. adopts public statements;
- e. is responsible for work in the areas of action determined by the Synod;
- f. establishes strategic committees and appoints their members. Each strategic committee is headed by a Council member.
- g. appoints standing or temporary committees and regulates their operations;
- h. elects the office management and exercises oversight over the offices;
- i. draws up annual reports, annual budgets and annual financial statements.

### **§ 29 Decision-making process**

<sup>1</sup> The Council's decisions are valid if the majority of its members are present.

<sup>2</sup> Every member of the Council who is present is required to vote.

## **C. The President of the PCS**

### **§ 30 General provisions**

<sup>1</sup> The President of the PCS is a member of the Council.

<sup>2</sup> She or he presides over the Council.

### **§ 31 Competence**

<sup>1</sup> The President of the PCS represents the PCS in public.

<sup>2</sup> She or he shall take care to foster communion between the member churches.

<sup>3</sup> She or he formulates suggestions for church life and

fulfilling the church's mission.

#### **D. Advisory Bodies**

##### **§ 32 Strategic committees**

- <sup>1</sup> The Council shall establish a strategic committee for each area of action determined by the Synod.
- <sup>2</sup> The strategic committees conduct program work and networking on behalf of the Council, and advise the Council on fundamental questions in their respective area of action.
- <sup>3</sup> For each strategic committee, the Council issues a mandate and appoints the committee's members.
- <sup>4</sup> Each strategic committee is headed by a member of the Council.

##### **§ 33 Conference of Church Presidiums (CCP)**

- <sup>1</sup> The CCP is comprised of the presidents of the member churches. In case of absence, presidents may be represented by a vice-president.
- <sup>2</sup> The President of the PCS moderates the CCP.
- <sup>3</sup> The CCP promotes the flow of information within the PCS, coordinates activities at various church levels as needed, addresses issues of common interest, and advises on other matters which are introduced by members or presented to it by the Council.
- <sup>4</sup> It can submit topics for deliberation to the Council.

#### **E. Offices**

##### **§ 34 Function and organization**

- <sup>1</sup> The offices support the Synod, the Council and the President of the PCS in fulfilling their tasks.
- <sup>2</sup> The Council determines the organization and duties of the office in rules and regulations.

#### **F. Audit Office**

##### **§ 35 Mission**

- <sup>1</sup> The Audit Office examines the accounting and annual financial statements of the PCS for compliance with legal requirements.
- <sup>2</sup> Its report is presented to the Synod.

#### **VI. Association**

**§ 36 Associated churches and communities**

<sup>1</sup> Association offers churches and communities that are not members of the PCS the possibility of an institutionalized form of encounter and structured exchange with the PCS. Associated churches and communities are not members within the meaning of Article IV (Membership).

<sup>2</sup> Association is open to

- a. Protestant churches and communities established in Switzerland which
  - 1. see themselves as a church or community within the Protestant tradition,
  - 2. have at least a regional span,
  - 3. are democratically constituted,
  - 4. are neither affiliated with a member church of the PCS nor belong to a synodal association that is a member of the PCS;
- b. Swiss Protestant churches and communities abroad.

<sup>3</sup> Association requires the approval of two-thirds of the Synod members present.

<sup>4</sup> Associated churches and communities shall delegate one representative to the Synod. They fulfill an advisory role in the Synod.

<sup>5</sup> The Council conducts a structured exchange with the associated churches and communities.

<sup>6</sup> The PCS or associated churches and communities may terminate the association at the end of a year, subject to a three-month notice period. The decision to terminate association by the PCS requires the approval of two-thirds of Synod members present.

**VII. Finances**

**§ 37 Policy**

The PCS covers its expenditures by

- a. membership dues,
- b. supplementary contributions,
- c. income from assets, and
- d. other contributions.

**§ 38 Membership dues**

<sup>1</sup> The member churches shall pay membership dues every year to cover the expenses that arise in accordance with the budget. The Council shall determine the payment deadline.

<sup>2</sup> The financial rules and regulations shall determine the amount of the membership dues of the member churches.

<sup>3</sup> Financial relief can be granted for the benefit of individual financially weak member churches.

<sup>4</sup> The voting rights of the Synod members of a member church shall be suspended if the member church has not paid the membership dues by the deadline set by the Council.

### **§ 39 Supplementary contributions**

The Synod decides on supplementary contributions and their apportionment among the member churches.

## **VIII. Constitutional Revision**

### **§ 40 Procedure**

<sup>1</sup> Proposals for amendment of the constitution require two readings in the Synod. The second reading shall take place at the following assembly of the Synod at the earliest.

<sup>2</sup> An amendment to the constitution requires two-thirds of the votes cast in the final vote.

<sup>3</sup> If designations used in the constitution are to be amended and the new designations added to the constitution, such adaptations can be made by the Synod presidium at the request of the Council.

### **§ 41 Dissolution**

<sup>1</sup> The Synod decides on the dissolution of the PCS.

<sup>2</sup> Dissolution requires the approval of two-thirds of the members of the Synod who are present.

<sup>3</sup> In the event of the dissolution of the PCS, the profits and capital of any successor organization shall be paid to the PCS or, in the absence of such an organization, shall be distributed to the member churches in accordance with the allocation key that was valid before the dissolution.

## **IX. Final Provisions**

### **§ 42 Entry into force**

<sup>1</sup> This constitution replaces the constitution of 13 June 1950.

<sup>2</sup> It enters into force on 1 January 2020.

**§ 43 Transitional and final provisions**

<sup>1</sup> The term of office of persons elected before the entry into force of the revised constitution shall last and end according to the old constitution. The provisions of the new constitution shall apply beginning with the first re-election.

<sup>2</sup> The incompatibilities of the new constitution with the old with respect to terms of office shall be given precedence in all elections beginning with the entry into force of the revised constitution.

<sup>3</sup> Until the entry into force of revised or newly created rules, regulations etc., the current provisions shall apply.

<sup>4</sup> In cases of doubt, the Synod presidium shall enact the necessary provisions in consultation with the Council.

## **Annex: Member Churches of the PCS**

Evangelisch-Reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Aargau

Evangelisch-reformierte Landeskirche beider Appenzell

Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche des Kantons Basel-Landschaft

Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche des Kantons Basel-Stadt

Evangelisch-reformierter Synodalverband Bern-Jura

Église évangélique réformée du canton de Fribourg

Église protestante de Genève

Evangelisch-Reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Glarus

Evangelisch-reformierte Landeskirche Graubünden

Evangelisch-Reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Luzern

Église réformée évangélique du canton de Neuchâtel

Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche Nidwalden

Verband der evangelisch-reformierten Kirchgemeinden des Kantons Obwalden

Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche des Kantons Schaffhausen

Evangelisch-reformierte Kantonalkirche Schwyz Evangelisch-Reformierte Kirche Kanton Solothurn

Evangelisch-reformierte Kirche des Kantons St. Gallen

Evangelische Landeskirche des Kantons Thurgau

Chiesa evangelica riformata nel Ticino

Evangelisch-Reformierte Landeskirche Uri

Église évangélique réformée du Canton de Vaud

Église réformée évangélique du Valais

Evangelisch-reformierte Kirchgemeinde des Kantons Zug

Evangelisch-reformierte Landeskirche des Kantons Zürich

Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche in der Schweiz

Église évangélique libre de Genève