



Bylaws of the Holy Catholic Church of the Gospels

Article I - Organization

Name of Organization:

The name of this organization shall be The Holy Catholic Church of the Gospels (HCCoG), where “Catholic” is understood in its original Greek sense of “universal.” This reflects our commitment to a faith that is inclusive and embracing of all humanity, irrespective of denominational affiliation.

Denomination:

While the HCCoG identifies within the broader Christian tradition, it serves as a unique expression within the catholic denominational tradition. It embodies Catholicism in its universal outreach and Gospel-centered foundation while remaining distinct from the Roman Catholic Church and other denominational structures.

The HCCoG conforms with a biblical understanding of the four marks of Catholicism:

1. Oneness – Christianity is the true Church of Christ, united in Him.
2. Holiness – The Church is made holy by Christ Himself, not by the body of believers, who are human, flawed, and imperfect.
3. Universality – The Church is universal, embracing the teachings of Christ and recognizing apostolic authority as a calling from God rather than a lineage-based tradition.
4. Apostolic Nature – Unlike many Catholic traditions that prioritize apostolic succession, the HCCoG affirms that Christ and God can call any person to ministry through the Holy Spirit, as demonstrated by the calling of Paul.

Purpose:

The purpose of the HCCoG is to prioritize the Gospel of Christ as the cornerstone of our faith, emphasizing the direct teachings of Jesus as the primary guide for living a Christian life. While we honor the entirety of Scripture, our focus is on living out the teachings of Jesus, which command us to love one another, serve 'The Least of These,' and recognize the image of Christ in every person.

We are dedicated to creating a community that acts as the living body of Christ on Earth, welcoming all, serving those in need, and fostering an environment where the transformative love of Christ is evident in every action.

We uphold the sacraments as vital expressions of faith, grace, and commitment to Christ, administered in accordance with our doctrinal beliefs.

Mission Statement:

Our mission is dual-faceted:

1. To spread the unconditional love of Christ to all corners of the world.
2. To cultivate a community where we see the face of Christ in each other.

We commit to this mission by actively engaging in:

- Service that uplifts the marginalized.
- Education that deepens faith and understanding.
- Worship that honors the Gospel's call to love, mercy, and justice.

In doing so, we affirm that our actions towards others reflect our service to Christ Himself.

Article II - Membership

Eligibility:

The HCCoG is committed to radical inclusivity and providing a welcoming atmosphere for all. Membership shall not be based on donations, morality, lifestyle, or other personal factors. It shall remain free and accessible to anyone who wishes to join.

Responsibilities of Members:

- Members should participate in worship, sacraments, and the communal life of the Church.
- While attendance is strongly encouraged, nonattendance shall not be grounds for the cancellation of membership.
- Membership shall only be canceled at the request of the member.

Rights of Members:

- All members have the right to join the Governing Committee of their local church.
- The Governing Committee shall vote on various church matters, with meeting minutes kept for record-keeping and transparency.
- Each member of the Governing Committee shall have one equal vote, ensuring fair and democratic decision-making within the Church.

Membership Registration:

Those who wish to become members shall complete a Membership Form with their local church. The form shall collect necessary information, including:

1. Full Name
2. Mailing Address
3. Willingness to become a member

Membership Record Keeping:

- Forms shall be kept on file at the local church and become part of the official church records.
- Only the priest of the church shall have access to these records, and they shall be safeguarded against unauthorized access.
- If the church uses a Membership Book, the form's contents shall be transferred to the book, after which the original form shall be shredded.
- The Membership Book shall be kept under lock and key when not in use.

Baptism & Confirmation in Membership:

- Baptism is central to the HCCoG's doctrine, as it signifies being claimed as Christ's own.
- A member does not need to be baptized within the HCCoG—baptism from any Christian denomination is recognized as valid.
- Members aged 14 and older are expected to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation, where they affirm their faith of their own choosing.

Membership of Minors & Family Membership:

- Minors (under 16) cannot sign a membership form but may be sponsored by:
 - A current church member,
 - The priest, or
 - Their parents/guardians.

- If a parent or guardian registers as a member, they may fill out a Family Membership Form.
- Children do not need to be listed individually—they will be automatically considered members until they reach the age of 16.
- Minor members under 16 shall not have the ability to join the Governing Body or vote until they come of age.

Storage of Member Information:

- All membership records and rolls shall be kept on-site at the church and shall not be removed unless written permission is granted by the Diocesan Bishop.
- If records must be removed, the priest must inform the Bishop of:
 1. Why the records are being removed.
 2. What they will be used for.
 3. When they will be returned (not to exceed 30 days from the date permission is granted).

Digital Storage of Membership Records:

- In the modern era, digital storage is often necessary, but due to the sensitive nature of membership records, the HCCoG strongly discourages digital storage until 25 years have passed since a member first registered.
- This caution is due to concerns over cybersecurity and hacking risks, ensuring that members' private information remains protected.
- This bylaw may be revised in the future as better security measures are developed.

Article III – Local Voting

Governing Body:

Every Church shall have a Governing Body of members that votes on matters of the church. The priest shall be an automatic voting member of this body and must be present at all meetings. While the priest may vote on all matters, they hold a special duty to uphold doctrine. If a vote contradicts core doctrine, the priest shall refer the matter to the Diocesan Bishop before implementation.

Doctrine Protection & Disputes:

If a matter of doctrine arises in a vote, the priest shall remind the Governing Body that doctrinal consistency is essential for the church to remain recognized as part of the HCCoG.

- If the priest is outvoted on a doctrinal matter, they shall report the decision to their Diocesan Bishop immediately after the vote.
- No doctrinal changes shall take effect until the Bishop has ruled on the matter.
- The Bishop shall review whether the church remains doctrinally aligned or if the vote represents a departure from the HCCoG's teachings.

Possible Outcomes:

1. If the Bishop determines that the vote does not significantly alter doctrine, the church shall remain recognized within the HCCoG.
2. If the Bishop determines that the church's doctrine has shifted significantly, the Governing Body shall receive a written statement from the Bishop informing them that the church is no longer recognized as an HCCoG congregation.
3. If the priest wishes to remain an HCCoG priest, they shall be reassigned to another church by their Bishop.

Conflict Resolution:

- Matters of conflict should first be arbitrated by the priest, ensuring that most disputes are resolved locally.
- Members have the right to appeal decisions to the Diocesan Bishop of their state or country.
- If an appeal is made, the Bishop must hear both the priest and the member before making a ruling.
- The Bishop shall confer with their superiors whenever possible to ensure consistency with established doctrine.

Matters That Can Be Voted Upon:

- Each church is unique, and we do not limit what may be voted upon except in matters that would harm or discriminate against members.
- Votes cannot be held on issues that marginalize or discriminate based on:
 - Orientation
 - Age

- Gender
- Disability
- Financial standing
- No vote may be held that would place an undue burden upon members.
 - *(Example: A church adopting a dress code requiring a three-piece suit, which would exclude those unable to afford such attire, would not be permissible.)*

Matters Regarding Doctrine:

- Each community is spiritually unique, and the interpretation of scripture may vary. However:
 - Doctrinal changes may only broaden inclusivity, not restrict it.
 - Scriptural interpretations may not be used to marginalize, degrade, or condemn others.
 - Doctrine cannot be altered in a way that restricts access to sacraments or full participation in the church.

Reformation of Former HCCoG Churches:

- If a church that departed from the HCCoG due to a doctrinal shift wishes to return after 30 days or more, they may request a Reformation Meeting with the Diocesan Bishop.
- At this meeting, the current bylaws shall be read aloud and voted upon.
- The Bishop shall be present but shall not vote.
- If the bylaws are adopted by majority vote, the church shall be fully restored as an HCCoG congregation.
- The Bishop retains the authority to ensure doctrinal adherence before formally recognizing the church's return

Article IV – Ordination, Hierarchy, and Leadership

Bishop of HCCoG:

The Bishop of HCCoG shall be seated for life on the condition of good behavior, overseeing the entire church and its operations as the final arbiter of all elevated matters. They shall lead the Conference of Diocesan Bishops, though they cannot vote unless breaking a tie.

The Bishop of HCCoG may:

- Set doctrine and issue encyclicals or other theological guidance.
- Revise the catechism when necessary.
- Implement doctrinal changes on a provisional basis for up to one year, during which the Conference of Diocesan Bishops must review and approve them before they become permanent.

If the Bishop of HCCoG dies, resigns, or is removed under Article VI, the Conference of Diocesan Bishops shall elect a successor from among their ranks.

- All Diocesan Bishops must be present for the vote.
- They shall have 14 days to travel and set their affairs in order before voting begins.
- The vote must reach a majority decision, and the Bishops must remain in session until a new leader is chosen.

Qualifications:

The Bishop of HCCoG must:

- Be at least 21 years old at the time of election.
- Be a Diocesan Bishop.
- Be known for great faith, wisdom, and inclusivity.

Diocesan Bishops of Countries:

Each country shall have a Diocesan Bishop, titled Bishop of (Country Name). They shall be appointed by the Bishop of HCCoG and serve at the Bishop's discretion.

Duties:

- Oversee the ordination of Diocesan Bishops within their country.
- Divide their country into districts (if no natural boundaries exist, such as states or provinces).
- Assist the HCCoG in seeking recognition or communion with other denominations.
- Remain in constant communication with their appointed bishops regarding faith, finances, and membership.

If a Country's Bishop dies, resigns, or is removed, they shall be replaced as soon as possible by the Bishop of HCCoG, selecting a Diocesan Bishop from within that country.

Qualifications:

- Requirements for office shall be set by the Bishop of HCCoG.
- Selection shall not be based on political ideation, loyalty, biological traits, financial status, or social status.
- Faith, professionalism, and spiritual leadership shall be the primary qualifications.

Ordinary Diocesan Bishops:

These Bishops oversee their own districts and report to their Country's Diocesan Bishop.

Duties:

- Ordain priests within their territory.
- Visit churches in their district.
- Hold mass at their district's cathedral.
- Maintain constant communication with their priests and superiors.
- Work with leaders of other Christian denominations whenever possible.

Qualifications:

- Must have been a priest for at least 5 years or have served at least five parishes (unless an exemption is granted by the Country's Diocesan Bishop).
- Must be at least 18 years old.
- Must be of good character, professional, and spiritually committed.
- Must have strong management skills, good conflict resolution abilities, and a strong working relationship with clergy and laity.

Priests:

Priests serve as the spiritual and administrative leaders of their assigned parish churches.

Duties:

- Lead Mass and administer sacraments.
- Oversee pastoral care for their congregation.
- Guide the church's Governing Body (ensuring decisions align with doctrine but without unilateral veto power).
- Perform baptisms, marriages, and funerals.
- Select and train deacons and acolytes.

- Manage church operations and administration.

Qualifications:

- Must complete one year of discernment before applying for priesthood.
- Must be sponsored by their parish priest.
- Must pass an examination by the priest on scripture, doctrine, sacraments, and pastoral care.
- Must be at least 18 years old and have a high school diploma.
- May be exempt from formal theological education if they demonstrate sufficient knowledge, subject to the Diocesan Bishop's approval.
- Must have been baptized and confirmed, either in the HCCoG or another denomination that practices confirmation.

Continuing Education for All Clergy & Leadership:

- All clergy and church leaders must engage in continuous theological education to deepen their understanding of scripture and faith.
- Each leader shall submit a quarterly report detailing an area of scripture or theology they are studying.
- After three years, leaders should consider studying an additional theological topic alongside their primary area of focus.
- Leaders are encouraged to share their learning with other clergy and members.
- Sabbaticals, materials, and resources for study shall be provided as financial resources allow.
- Recognizing the digital age, leaders are encouraged to utilize free online theological courses, research papers, and academic manuscripts.

Article V – Doctrine and Liturgy

Doctrine:

We recognize that the Bible has been compiled over centuries and does not represent the complete story of God's revelation. Archaeological discoveries continue to uncover new elements of scripture, expanding our understanding of biblical history. However, we acknowledge the fundamental truths of the Christian faith as encapsulated in the Nicene Creed.

We believe in interpreting the Bible both exegetically and hermeneutically. However, when engaging in hermeneutical interpretation, we hold that scripture must be understood in the light most favorable to the spirit of Christ and His mission. Therefore, we reject exclusionary readings

of scripture and instead emphasize opening the floodgates of God's grace rather than closing doors.

As such, all teachings, directives, encyclicals, and other Church documents shall prioritize inclusivity over exclusivity. This article, in conjunction with the HCCoG's Statement of Doctrine, shall constitute the definition of the word "doctrine" both in this article and in the bylaws as a whole.

While encyclicals, directives, and teachings contribute to Church doctrine, they must align with the foundational beliefs of the HCCoG and remain open to theological review as needed.

Liturgy:

Following the ancient Catholic tradition, we uphold a liturgical form of worship, consisting of the following elements:

- Procession of the cross
- Incense (to be used at least one service every Sunday and on high feast days)
- Hymns and sacred worship music
- The Peace
- Prayers
- Old Testament and New Testament readings
- Psalm readings
- Gospel readings
- Homilies
- Confession of sin and absolution
- Holy Eucharist
- Benediction

We shall follow the Revised Common Lectionary for readings and adhere to the liturgical year and its seasons.

All clergy, when officiating services, shall wear the appropriate liturgical colors for the season. In cases where full vestments are not available, clergy shall maintain reverence in their attire to the best of their ability.

Clerical Attire & Symbols of Office:

For Priests:

- Priests shall wear a cassock or alb, surplice, stole, and chasuble when officiating services.
- A pectoral crucifix may be worn as a sign of their ministry, though its use is at the discretion of the priest.
- A priest may wear a black biretta and/or zucchetto if they choose.
- Upon ordination, a pastoral ring with a simple black stone shall be given by their ordaining cleric.

For Bishops:

- Bishops may wear a mitre, cope, and carry a crosier as symbols of their office.
- Bishops shall receive a pastoral ring with a purple stone upon consecration.
- Bishops shall be the only clergy permitted to wear a purple cassock and biretta with zucchetto.

Music in Worship:

- Worship music shall consist of hymns and sacred music that align with the theological and liturgical traditions of the HCCoG.
- While musical diversity is encouraged, all selections must reflect reverence and theological integrity.

Article VI – Removal from Office

Good Behavior:

Good behavior shall be defined as adherence to these bylaws. Regarding secular laws, we recognize that not all laws are just. Some nations criminalize Christianity itself or certain religious practices. Therefore, violations of secular law shall not be grounds for removal if the act was done in accordance with Christian principles and morality.

Removal Process:

Upon infraction, the Conference of Diocesan Bishops shall request an account of actions from the accused for clarification of intent before proceeding. This ensures removal is not needlessly considered.

1. Vote of No Confidence
 - If the account of actions is indefensible, the Bishops shall notify the Bishop of HCCoG that a vote of no confidence is being initiated.

- A 2/3 majority vote in favor of no confidence is required to proceed to a trial phase.
2. Trial Phase
 - The Bishop of HCCoG shall be represented by Church attorneys.
 - The trial shall be conducted by the longest-serving Bishop (Ordinary or Country), who shall act as Judge.
 - The Judge shall ensure fairness but cannot overturn the verdict of the Bishops.
 - A word-for-word record shall be kept by an appointed clerk.
 3. Final Vote for Removal
 - If found guilty of violating bylaws, abusing authority, or harming the dignity of members, the Conference of Bishops shall hold a final vote for removal.
 - A simple majority is required for removal.
 - If the accused is cleared of all charges, no removal vote shall take place.

Cathedra Vacante – Vacancy of the Bishopric

If the Bishop of HCCoG is removed, resigns, or dies, a Cathedra Vacante is declared. All authority previously vested in the Bishop is now vested collectively in the Conference of Bishops.

1. Authority of the Conference of Bishops
 - No single individual may act as Bishop during the vacancy.
 - No doctrinal, liturgical, or canonical changes shall be enacted during this time.
 - To execute any authority normally held by the Bishop, a minimum of a 2/3 majority is required, up to unanimity.
2. Operational & Administrative Functions
 - Day-to-day Church operations shall be managed by the Conference of Bishops collectively.
 - Each Diocesan Bishop retains jurisdiction over their own territory.
 - Financial transactions exceeding a set threshold (to be determined in bylaws) shall require approval by the Conference of Bishops.
3. Election of a New Bishop

- The Conference of Bishops shall convene 14 days after the vacancy to elect a new Bishop of HCCoG.
- All Diocesan Bishops must be present.
- The election shall continue until a majority decision is reached.

Protection of Witnesses:

- No witness shall be intimidated, bribed, or threatened for their testimony.
- A list of witnesses shall be provided to the accused 7 days before the vote of no confidence, ensuring a fair process.
- The Bishop of HCCoG shall not be forced to testify against themselves.
- The accused's own statements shall be viewed in the light most favorable to them when possible.

Review Process for Wrongful Removal:

Recognizing that mistakes can be made, if new evidence emerges that suggests the removal was in error, the Conference of Bishops must convene to correct the wrong.

1. If a New Bishop Has Been Elected:
 - The removed Bishop's name shall be cleared, and they shall become Bishop Emeritus.
 - The Bishop Emeritus may serve in an advisory capacity, create their own office, and retain voting rights within the Conference of Bishops.
2. If the Seat Remains Vacant:
 - The removed Bishop may be reinstated if no new Bishop has been elected and a majority vote supports reinstatement.

Evidence and Transparency:

- Upon the receipt of exonerating evidence, the Conference of Bishops shall convene within 5 days to form a committee to review the evidence.
- All findings shall be made available to the accused.
- Evidence may be withheld only if it contains sensitive information, but it must still be listed in an evidence index with a reason for withholding.

- Transparency is a fundamental principle of the HCCoG and this bylaw shall only ever be expanded, never restricted, in that regard.

Sensitive Evidence:

- Evidence provided by minors, victims, or disabled persons shall be protected and only accessible to those directly involved in the trial.
- Sensitive evidence shall be sealed for 100 years, ensuring historical transparency while protecting those involved.
- If the evidence includes confession-related material, it shall remain sealed for 150 years after the confessor's death to preserve the sanctity of the sacrament of confession.

Considerations for Evidence Release:

- When evidence approaches its release date, the Conference of Bishops shall evaluate whether public disclosure would cause harm to victims or the accused.
- The Archivist of the Conference of Bishops shall safeguard all sensitive materials under strict confidentiality.

List of Removed Clergy & Public Accountability:

- The Conference of Bishops shall publish a quarterly list of clergy removed from office, including the reason for removal.
- A separate public list of abusive clergy shall include:
 - Date of allegations
 - When the Church was informed
 - Actions taken in response
- No removed cleric may ever be reinstated in any denomination of the HCCoG if their removal was due to abuse or misconduct.
- Any Church member who attempts to conceal misconduct shall be immediately and permanently removed from office.
- The HCCoG is committed to full transparency in clergy discipline.

Article VII – Discipline of Clergy

Abuses by Clergy

In recent years, there have been members of the clergy partaking in evil and vile practices. The HCCoG abhors all abuse and has deemed it necessary to codify accountability measures within its bylaws.

While the seal of confession is sacred and inviolable, it has been misused in some cases to shield abusive clergy. The HCCoG affirms the sanctity of confession but also holds that accountability before God and man is required.

Mandatory Reporting of Clergy Misconduct

If a congregant confesses to any clergy member that another cleric is abusing their position, that cleric must immediately report the allegation to their superior.

- The Diocesan Bishop shall be the superior in this case.
- Upon receiving an allegation of clergy misconduct, the local bishop shall place the accused cleric on immediate administrative leave, restricting their ministry until the investigation is complete.
- If preliminary evidence suggests a credible accusation, the cleric shall be fully removed from office pending further review.

If the claim is substantiated, the bishop shall:

- Forward the investigation to civil authorities for legal action.
- Report the findings to their superior within the Church.
- Remove the cleric from office immediately, revoking their ordination permanently.

If the claims are unsubstantiated, this shall not be treated as a declaration of innocence. Instead, the Church shall:

- Assign a supervising cleric with experience in pastoral oversight to monitor the accused cleric for a period only known to the bishop.
- The supervising cleric shall have full authority to escalate concerns if misconduct is observed.
- At the end of the monitoring period, the supervising cleric shall submit a report to the local bishop, who shall determine if further monitoring is needed.

All clergy must remember that they represent not only the Church but God, Christ, and the entire Christian faith. Their actions reflect upon Christianity as a whole, and any abuse of their position will not be tolerated.

Clergy Removal & Public Notification

All clergy found guilty of abusing their position shall be:

1. Notified in writing of their removal.
2. Informed that their name will be placed on the public list of abusive clergy.
3. Informed that the Church will fully cooperate with civil authorities.
4. Publicly disclosed to their congregation via an official notice.

Public Notification to Congregations

- A formal notice shall be sent to the congregation of the removed cleric.
- The notice shall include the reason for removal in a manner that respects legal constraints and privacy laws while ensuring transparency.

List of Abusive Clergy & Transparency Measures

- A list of all clergy found guilty of abuse or misconduct shall be compiled quarterly by the Conference of Bishops.
- At the end of the fiscal year, the HCCoG shall publish a full list of clergy removals.
- The list shall be publicly available in every HCCoG church.
- If a cleric is under investigation, they shall not be listed publicly unless required by legal mandate or urgent concerns for public safety.

Interdenominational Cooperation

To prevent abusive clergy from being rehired elsewhere, the HCCoG shall proactively share its list of abusive clergy with all major Christian denominations, whether in communion with the HCCoG or not.

- Denominations receiving this information must acknowledge receipt.
- Upon request, the HCCoG shall provide its list of abusive clergy to any Christian body that seeks it for safety purposes.

Discipline & Removal of Bishops

Reporting & Immediate Actions Against a Bishop

- If credible allegations are made against a Diocesan Bishop (Ordinary or Country's Bishop), the Bishop of HCCoG shall oversee the case as Judge over the ecclesiastical trial.

- The accused Bishop is placed on immediate administrative leave, and an interim administrator is appointed by their superior to govern the diocese temporarily.
- If the allegations involve criminal conduct, abuse, or doctrinal violations, the HCCoG shall immediately forward all evidence to civil authorities while conducting its own ecclesiastical trial.

Appointment of Interim Bishops

Interim leadership follows hierarchical structure, ensuring no direct Conference control over dioceses while maintaining order and governance during trials.

If the accused is an Ordinary Diocesan Bishop:

- The Country's Diocesan Bishop appoints an interim administrator or takes direct oversight of the diocese.

If the accused is a Country's Diocesan Bishop:

- The Bishop of HCCoG appoints an interim administrator or takes direct oversight of the country's diocesan affairs.
- Interim bishops do not have voting rights in the Conference of Bishops since they are not seated permanently.

Ecclesiastical Trial for Bishops

Because bishops govern entire dioceses and ordain clergy, their removal must follow a formal trial process rather than mere administrative action.

Ecclesiastical Trial Structure:

- Presiding Judge: The Bishop of HCCoG serves as Judge in all cases involving bishops.
- Jury: The entire Conference of Diocesan Bishops acts as the jury.
- Prosecution: The Church's legal representatives (Church Attorneys) represent the HCCoG.
- Defense: The accused Bishop may appoint Church Attorneys for their defense.
- Archivist/Scribe: The Church Archivist records the trial verbatim for transparency and historical accuracy.

Trial Process:

1. Opening Statements (Prosecution & Defense)
2. Presentation of Evidence & Witness Testimonies

3. Examination & Cross-Examination of the Accused (if they choose to testify)
4. Closing Arguments
5. Jury Deliberation & Vote
6. Final Verdict & Sentencing (if guilty)

Voting & Removal of a Bishop

- A 2/3 majority vote by the Conference of Bishops is required to convict.
- If convicted, the accused is permanently removed from office and stripped of their ordination.
- If acquitted, the Bishop is reinstated with full honors.

Appointment of Permanent Replacements

If a Bishop is removed:

- Ordinary Diocesan Bishops: The Country's Bishop appoints a permanent successor within 30 days.
- Country's Bishops: The Bishop of HCCoG appoints a permanent successor within 30 days.
- All new bishops must be confirmed through the same appointment and elevation process outlined in Article IV – Ordination, Hierarchy, and Leadership.
- The removed Bishop permanently loses all authority and may never hold an ecclesiastical office again.
- If a removed Bishop later seeks exoneration, a Review Committee may re-examine the case, but they cannot be reinstated as a bishop.

Article VIII: – Archivist

Role Defined

The Archivist of the HCCoG shall be responsible for document handling, preservation, and maintaining confidentiality. They shall serve as the point of contact for all archival inquiries and oversee a staff of five. The Archivist shall:

- Properly log and catalog all materials.
- Have formal education in document preservation techniques.
- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding sensitive Church records.

Qualifications

The Archivist must:

- Be at least 35 years old.
- Be a member of the HCCoG.
- Know the doctrine of the faith.
- Hold a degree from an accredited institution in archaeology, preservation techniques, or document handling.
- Be skilled in document restoration and preservation methods.

Staff & Access Control

- The Archivist shall have full authority over hiring, dismissing, and managing their staff.
- The five support staff shall not have clearance to access confidential records unless directly supervised by the Archivist and only for essential preservation or retrieval tasks.

Disaster Protocol

Gracious as God is, we acknowledge that natural disasters do occur. The Archivist shall, upon taking office, create or review existing disaster protocols to protect the Church's records before, during, and after disasters.

- The Archivist shall maintain at least one off-site backup storage facility for critical records to ensure preservation in the event of regional disasters.
- When possible, additional copies of the most vital Church documents shall be stored in an international repository approved by the Conference of Bishops.

Destruction of Documents & Materials

- No Church documents or materials shall be destroyed.
- Preservation of all records is mandatory, with degraded materials prioritized for restoration.

Oversight & Independence

- The Office of the Archivist shall operate independently.
- The Archivist shall be appointed by the Bishop of the HCCoG, confirmed by the Conference of Bishops after examination, and then installed.
- The Archivist is not subject to any governing body or person, except for oversight established by the Conference of Bishops through bylaws.

Digitization of Records

Due to the fragile nature of records, only microfilm shall be used for digitization until secure and cost-effective digital storage methods are proven viable.

- The Conference of Bishops and the Archivist must jointly assess the viability of new digital methods before adoption.
- No records may be transmitted via fax, email, or other mechanical processes that could compromise security.

Reviewing Records

To access records, a written request must be submitted to the Archivist, including:

- The requestor's name, membership status, and role in the Church.
- Verification of identity (confirmed by the requestor's church or supervisor).
- For public researchers, only non-confidential documents may be accessed.

Record Review Process:

- Government-issued identification must be recorded and kept on file.
- If approved, the Archivist assigns a date range for inspection of records.
- The requestor signs a logbook upon arrival, and records are logged as checked in/out.
- The logbook and check-in records must be stored for 10 years before archiving via microfilm.

Microfilm Records

- Five microfilm copies shall be made of each document.

- One microfilm reel is for use, while four serve as backups.
- Microfilm reels shall be tested for readability every six months.
- If degradation is detected, emergency duplication must occur immediately.

Paper Records

- Loose paper records must be copied to microfilm upon receipt.
- Fragile documents shall be stored in acid-free protectors in climate-controlled storage.
- Books must be treated with preservation chemicals that do not degrade condition.
- Encasing documents in epoxy shall be explored for long-term preservation.

Certification of Church Documents

- All official Church documents must be made in triplicate using archival-grade printing methods for typewriters and carbon paper.
- The Archivist must certify all copies as faithful representations of the original.
- Only certified documents shall carry legal weight within the Church.

Certification Format:

"I, _____, the Archivist of the HCCoG, have personally reviewed the Original Copy of this document and certify these copies of the original to be a faithful representation and rendering of the Original."

(Signed, dated, and the seal of the Archivist affixed.)

Considerations for Future Technologies

- The Church shall not prohibit digital storage indefinitely but shall only adopt methods that are both secure and cost-effective.
- The Conference of Bishops and the Archivist must approve any future digital storage methods before implementation.

Article IX: Meetings

Frequency:

- Vestry Meetings: Shall be held weekly to ensure consistent local church governance.
- Local Bishopric Meetings: Shall be held monthly to maintain regional oversight and unity.
- Conference of All Bishops: Shall be held yearly to provide global oversight while reducing logistical burdens.

Before each meeting, a person shall be designated as the official keeper of minutes, responsible for maintaining an accurate written record. If necessary, video or audio recordings may be used to supplement or ensure accuracy. All minutes must be reviewed and approved at the start of the following meeting, with amendments allowed as necessary.

Quorum:

- For voting on measures to be officially adopted, there must be at least three-fourths of voting members present.
- In the case of bishopric conferences, the leader of the conference may, with the permission of the Bishop of HCCoG, abridge the quorum in cases of emergency, natural disaster, or extraordinary circumstances that prevent full attendance. The reasons for abridging the quorum must be documented in the meeting minutes.
- Voting Threshold: Any matter voted upon shall be considered agreed to and adopted only if a simple majority (half the total voting members plus one) is present and votes in favor. This standard applies to all voting bodies, including vestries, bishoprics, and conferences.

Emergency Meetings:

- Emergency meetings may be called at any time by the presiding priest, bishop, or the Bishop of HCCoG.
- Notification of such meetings must be given to all members as soon as possible, and efforts should be made to ensure quorum is met.
- Emergency meeting minutes must detail the reason for the meeting and the urgency of the matters discussed.

Record Storage:

- All official meeting minutes and recordings shall be submitted to the Office of the Archivist for secure storage and preservation.
- Vestry and local bishopric minutes shall be stored at the parish or diocesan level, with annual summaries submitted to the Archivist.

Article X: Financials

Distribution of Assets

All local assets of a church shall be distributed in the following order of priority:

1. Upkeep of the building, utilities, and payment of all loans, rents, and mortgages.
2. Salaries of paid staff.
3. Remaining funds may be:
 - Distributed to charitable causes whose missions align with the values of the HCCoG.
 - Saved to educate or train clergy who lack financial means.

Forbidden Financial Distributions

- Financial assets shall not be given to political organizations or drawn upon by private persons for personal reasons.
- Paid members of the Church may not access financial assets outside of their salary.
- All leftover funds placed into savings must be used to further the mission of the Church or support organizations aligned with Church values.

Donations, Entitlements, and Bequeathments

The HCCoG recognizes that members may donate property, money, or other assets during their lifetime or after death.

- Donations are voluntary and are not required for membership.
- Tithing is encouraged as an act of faith but is not mandated by scripture.
- Donors shall not receive preferential treatment regarding the Church's direction, mission, or doctrine.
- Bribery of voting members or clergy is forbidden (see *Financial Misconduct* below).

Property donations after death (via family or will) must align with:

- The wishes of the deceased or their family, as long as these align with the Church's mission and values.
- If a donation violates the law or contradicts Church values, it shall be refused and returned to the family or estate.
- Illegal or unethical donations will not be accepted under any circumstances.

The Office of the Treasurer

The Office of the Treasurer shall be established under this article, responsible for all financial management, oversight, and reporting.

Duties of the Treasurer:

- Record all donations, including donor names and intended use of donations.
- Oversee all expenses and assets owned or received by the Church.
- Document all deposits, withdrawals, and payments, including date and time.
- Submit quarterly financial reports to the governing body and the Office of the Archivist.
- Ensure financial records are preserved for at least 10 years before being archived via microfilm or other secure methods.

Financial Oversight & Transparency

- An independent audit shall be conducted annually by an external auditor or designated financial oversight committee.
- The governing body of the Church must review and approve all financial reports and audits.
- Distribution to charitable causes must be approved by the church's governing body, ensuring alignment with HCCoG values.
- The Treasurer must document all charitable payments in quarterly reports for transparency.

Financial Misconduct

Bribery:

- Bribery of voting members or clergy is strictly forbidden.
- Any member proven to have accepted or offered bribes shall be immediately removed from their position and barred from holding any future office within the Church.
- While bribery is not legally actionable, the Church will treat such misconduct with the utmost seriousness to preserve its integrity.

Embezzlement & Theft:

- Any member or clergy found guilty of embezzlement, theft, or other financial crimes shall be referred to civil authorities for legal prosecution.
- The Church shall fully cooperate with legal investigations and ensure that justice is pursued in accordance with the law.

Record Preservation & Storage

- All financial records shall be submitted to the Office of the Archivist for secure storage and preservation.
- Records must be kept for at least 10 years before being transferred to microfilm or other secure archival methods.
- The Archivist shall ensure that all financial records are properly cataloged, preserved, and protected from unauthorized access.

Review of Donations in Conflict with Church Values

- Donations or bequests that may conflict with the Church's mission or values shall be reviewed by the Treasurer and the governing body.
- If deemed incompatible, the donation shall be refused and returned to the donor or their estate, with clear documentation of the reasons for refusal.

Article XI: Future Matters

The Future of HCCoG

Nothing in these bylaws shall be construed as unalterable. The HCCoG recognizes the importance of adaptability while maintaining faithfulness to core Christian tenets.

Amending Bylaws

1. General Bylaw Amendments:
 - Any bylaw can be added, repealed, or altered by a simple majority vote at the Conference of Bishops.
 - Significant structural amendments—those affecting Church hierarchy, financial oversight, or doctrinal interpretation—shall require a two-thirds majority.
 - Any bishop may propose an amendment, which must be submitted in writing at least 30 days before the vote.
2. Voting Thresholds for Bylaws:
 - A simple majority is required for routine amendments.

- A two-thirds majority is required for amendments that affect the Church's structure, governance, or interpretation of doctrine.

Doctrinal Changes

1. Expansion of Doctrine:

- The doctrine of the HCCoG may be expanded by a two-thirds majority vote of the Conference of Bishops, including the Bishop of HCCoG.
- A 30-day period of discernment shall precede any doctrinal vote, during which bishops may consult with clergy and laity.

2. Limitations on Doctrine:

- Any doctrinal change that would impose limitations—restricting inclusion, access to sacraments, or core beliefs—shall require a unanimous vote.
- The Bishop of HCCoG's vote shall be counted in both expansion and limitation decisions.

Theological Matters

1. Core Christian Tenets:

- On theological matters related to the core principles of the Christian faith as outlined in the Nicene Creed, no vote may be held, and no alterations can be made.

2. Non-Core Theological Matters:

- For theological issues not related to the Nicene Creed, a three-fourths majority is required for the motion to be agreed to and adopted.

3. Evidence-Based Theological Changes:

- Theological proposals must be supported by scriptural, historical, or theological evidence consistent with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- A Theological Review Committee, composed of selected bishops and clergy, shall evaluate the evidence and determine whether it meets the standard of beyond a reasonable doubt before a vote can proceed.

Safeguards & Stability

1. Limitations on Frequency of Changes:

- No bylaw or doctrinal change may be proposed more than once within a 12-month period, unless significant new evidence or circumstances arise.
 - This ensures stability and prevents frivolous alterations to the Church's foundational principles.
2. Resolving Disagreements and Ties:
- If a required voting threshold is not met, the proposal shall be tabled for reconsideration at the next Conference of Bishops.
 - In cases of a tie, the Bishop of HCCoG shall cast the deciding vote, unless the matter pertains to limiting doctrine, in which case no change shall be adopted without unanimity.

Article XII: Dissolution

Procedure for Dissolution

Upon a unanimous vote by the Conference of Bishops—local, territorial, and in coordination with the Bishop of HCCoG—the Church shall be dissolved.

1. Timing of Dissolution:
 - The dissolution shall take place one year after the vote is agreed to and adopted.
2. Final Review:
 - A final review shall occur six months after the vote for dissolution is adopted.
 - The Conference of Bishops may reconsider the dissolution if new circumstances arise.
 - If no reconsideration occurs, dissolution will proceed as scheduled.

Distribution of Assets

1. Priority Payments:
 - All assets shall first be used to pay staff salaries, outstanding bills, and settle debts (loans, rents, mortgages, utilities).
2. Distribution of Remaining Funds:
 - After all obligations are met, remaining funds shall be distributed as follows:
 - In compliance with local, state, and national laws governing nonprofit organizations.

- Returned to members if legally feasible.
 - Donated to charities whose missions align with the HCCoG's values if returning funds is not legally permitted.
3. Oversight of Asset Sales:
- The Office of the Treasurer, in coordination with the Bishop of HCCoG and the Conference of Bishops, shall oversee the sale of all Church assets.
 - A final financial report shall be submitted and made available to all members before distribution of funds.

Preservation of Historical Records

- All preserved documents shall be maintained by the Bishop of HCCoG at the time of dissolution.
- Upon the Bishop's death or inability to maintain the records, the documents shall be transferred to a recognized historical archive or partnering theological institution to ensure their continued preservation.

Ecclesiastical Duties During Transition

- During the transition period leading to dissolution, the Bishop of HCCoG and the Conference of Bishops shall ensure that all sacramental duties, pastoral care, and ecclesiastical responsibilities continue uninterrupted until the final dissolution date.

Nullification of Bylaws

- Upon dissolution and after all accounts are settled, these bylaws shall be considered null and void from that point forward.