

Heritage Covenant Church (HCC)

Policy on Christian Education

1. Theological Foundation for Christian Education

Heritage Covenant Church affirms that Jesus Christ is Lord over all of life, and therefore the education of children must be brought into submission to His Word. Scripture teaches that children are a covenant blessing from the Lord and are to be raised in the fear and instruction of the Lord (Deut. 6:4–9; Eph. 6:4). This instruction is not limited to formal moments of worship but encompasses the whole of life, shaping how children think, learn, and understand the world around them.

Because all truth is God’s truth, education is never neutral. Every system of education rests upon foundational beliefs about God, man, and reality. Therefore, Christian parents are called to ensure that their children are instructed in a way that is consciously and consistently grounded in Scripture and the Reformed faith. The goal of Christian education is not merely intellectual development, but the formation of the whole person—heart, mind, and life—so that they may love God, walk in His ways, and serve Him faithfully in every area of life.

This calling flows directly from God’s covenant promises. Covenant children are not to be raised as spiritually neutral individuals, but as those who are nurtured in the faith and disciplined from their earliest years. Christian education is therefore an essential component of covenant discipleship and cannot be separated from the broader task of raising children in the Lord.

2. Historic Reformed Precedent

From the time of the Reformation, the church has consistently recognized the importance of Christian education as essential to covenant faithfulness. The Reformers understood that the renewal of the church and the transformation of society depended upon the faithful instruction of children in the truth of God’s Word. As a result, Reformed churches labored not only in preaching and pastoral ministry, but also in the establishment of schools where children could be educated in a distinctly Christian worldview.

John Calvin emphasized the necessity of Christian instruction for the life of the church, arguing that the future of the church depended upon properly teaching the next generation. In Geneva, Calvin labored to establish schools connected to the church so that children would be formed in doctrine and godliness. He wrote:

“The church of God will never preserve itself without a catechism.”

This conviction carried forward into the broader Reformed tradition Abraham Kuyper articulated the comprehensive lordship of Christ over every sphere of life, including education. He famously declared:

“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: ‘Mine!’”

Herman Bavinck likewise emphasized that education is inherently shaped by one’s view of God and the world. He argued:

“Education is never neutral... it is always governed by a principle, and that principle is religious.”

This concern was also expressed clearly by J Gresham Machen who warned of the dangers of secular education and the necessity of Christian schooling:

“The most important Christian educational institution is the Christian school... Without it, the Church is in danger of losing its children.”

Together, these voices reflect a unified Reformed witness: that Christian education is essential, not optional, and that the church must take seriously its responsibility to ensure the faithful instruction of covenant children.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that the long-term direction of the church and society is shaped by the education of its children. Where the instruction of the next generation is no longer rooted in the truth of God’s Word, there is a gradual but unmistakable drift away from the faith. Over time, this leads not only to theological confusion, but to the weakening of families, churches, and communities. The church in every age must therefore recognize that the formation of its children is not a peripheral concern, but a central responsibility tied to its faithfulness and future. For this reason, Heritage Covenant Church seeks to be intentional and diligent in the Christian education of its children, trusting that faithful sowing in one generation bears fruit in the next.

3. Confessional and Ecclesiastical Commitment

This theological and historical conviction is reflected in the decisions of the Reformed churches. The Synod of Dort (1618–1619), in its Church Order, emphasized the importance of instructing covenant children in the doctrines of Scripture and ensuring that they are trained in the Christian faith. The churches recognized that the instruction of youth is essential to the preservation of the truth and the continuation of the church from generation to generation.

In continuity with this heritage, the Christian Reformed Church in North America has affirmed that Christian education is a natural and necessary outworking of covenant faithfulness. The CRCNA has historically encouraged parents to provide Christian schooling for their children and has called the church to promote and support such education as part of its broader ministry.

Likewise, the Reformed church order reflects this responsibility. Elders are called not only to shepherd the congregation but also to assist in the instruction of the youth and to promote God-centered education within the life of the church.

Together, these commitments make clear that Christian education is not a matter of preference, but a responsibility grounded in Scripture, affirmed by the Reformed tradition, and upheld by the church.

4. Covenant Foundation and Baptismal Vows

The church's commitment to Christian education is rooted in God's covenant and expressed through the vows made at baptism. When parents present their children for baptism, they promise before God and His church to instruct their children in the truth of God's Word, in the way of salvation through Jesus Christ; to pray for them and teach them to pray; and to train them in Christ's way by their example, through worship, and in the nurture of the church.

These vows necessarily include the responsibility to ensure that the child's education is shaped by biblical truth. Christian education is therefore not optional but is a direct outworking of covenant faithfulness.

The congregation also makes a covenantal promise to love, encourage, and support both the parents and the child by teaching the gospel, modeling the Christian life, and providing support through fellowship, prayer, and service. These shared vows establish that Christian education is not an isolated responsibility but one carried out within the life of the covenant community. These vows bind both parents and the church to pursue the faithful Christian formation of covenant children in all areas of life, including their education.

5. Role and Responsibility of Parents

Heritage Covenant Church affirms that the primary responsibility and jurisdiction for the education of children belongs to the parents. God has entrusted parents with the authority and calling to raise their children in the fear and instruction of the Lord, shaping not only their spiritual lives but also their thinking, learning, and understanding of the world. This parental responsibility is covenantal in nature and flows directly from the vows made at baptism, by which parents commit before God and His church to instruct their children in the truth of His Word and to train them in the way of Christ.

This responsibility cannot be abdicated or transferred entirely to another institution. While parents may make use of various educational models, they remain accountable before God for ensuring that their children are formed in a distinctly Christian worldview that is faithful to Scripture and consistent with the Reformed faith. Parents are therefore expected to take an active and intentional role in overseeing their children's education so that it aligns with God's Word and promotes faithful discipleship.

At the same time, while jurisdiction belongs to the family, the church also bears a real covenant responsibility within the body of Christ. The church is called to encourage and exhort parents toward faithfulness to the Word of God and to the vows they have made. This responsibility is exercised through spiritual oversight and the life of the covenant community, ensuring that parents are not left alone in their calling but are supported in fulfilling their God-given responsibility.

6. Role of the Church

The church supports parents in fulfilling their covenant responsibilities without replacing their authority. Through the ministry of the Word and the oversight of the elders, the church provides instruction, encouragement, and accountability. The elders are called to shepherd the congregation, which includes assisting in the instruction of the youth and promoting God-centered education.

This responsibility is carried out through preaching, catechetical instruction, discipleship, and pastoral care. The church will provide structured opportunities for instruction, such as Sunday school, catechism classes, and discipleship pathways like The Heritage Way. The elders also offer guidance to families as they make educational decisions, encouraging faithfulness and addressing concerns when needed.

7. Role of the Deacons and Practical Support

The deacons serve the congregation by administering works of mercy and helping meet material needs within the body. In the area of Christian education, this includes assisting families who may need financial or practical support in order to provide a faithful Christian education for their children.

This support may take the form of tuition assistance, curriculum help, or other forms of aid. Such assistance is intended to remove unnecessary barriers so that covenant children may be raised in the instruction of the Lord.

8. Diaconal Priority and Membership Expectations

In administering support, the church will prioritize those whom Scripture calls the church to care for, especially widows, orphans, and families experiencing genuine financial hardship. At the same time, assistance will ordinarily be directed toward confessing members who are in good standing and actively participating in the life of the church.

This ensures that the church's resources are used to strengthen covenant faithfulness within the body and to support those who are living under the oversight and care of the church.

9. Educational Expectations and Pathways

Heritage Covenant Church recognizes that families may pursue different educational approaches, including Christian day schools, homeschooling, or hybrid models. However, regardless of the form, the standard remains the same: education must be intentionally and consistently Christian in its worldview, content, and purpose.

Parents are expected to ensure that their chosen approach does not contradict Scripture and that it actively contributes to the spiritual formation of their children. The church will encourage wise and faithful decisions while avoiding binding consciences where Scripture does not give explicit command.

At the same time, the church recognizes that families may face unique circumstances that affect educational decisions. These may include limitations related to geographic location, the absence of accessible Christian schooling, special educational or developmental needs, financial constraints, or other unique family situations. In such cases, the church seeks to walk alongside families with wisdom, compassion, and pastoral care, helping them pursue faithfulness within their particular circumstances.

While acknowledging these realities, the church maintains that intentionally Christian education remains the biblical ideal and goal. However, this commitment must never

give rise to a culture of legalism or spiritual comparison. The church does not regard families facing difficult circumstances as lesser participants in the kingdom of God, nor does it measure faithfulness merely by educational form. Instead, the aim is to cultivate a community marked by grace, truth, and mutual encouragement, where families are supported in pursuing faithfulness to Christ according to His Word and within the providence of their lives.

10. Pastoral Responsibility and Example

Ministers of the Word are called to lead by example in all areas of life, including the raising and education of their children. They are to model covenant faithfulness in their homes and demonstrate a commitment to Christian education as part of their pastoral calling.

In recognition of this responsibility, the congregation commits to supporting its pastors so that they are able to faithfully carry out their duties without undue burden. This includes providing sufficient financial support to enable them to educate their children in a manner consistent with their calling and convictions.

11. Financial Support and Stewardship

The church acknowledges that Christian education often requires sacrifice, and therefore seeks to steward its resources in a way that supports families in this calling. Financial assistance will be administered carefully, prayerfully, and with accountability, ensuring that it aligns with both the needs of the members and the mission of the church.

In keeping with its covenantal commitments, Heritage Covenant Church affirms that the support of Christian education is not incidental but is a meaningful and ongoing responsibility of the body. Therefore, the church shall include, as a regular and intentional portion of its annual budget, funds designated to assist in the Christian education of covenant children. This ensures that the church's commitment is not merely aspirational but is reflected in its stewardship and financial priorities.

The goal of such support is not merely relief, but the strengthening of families and the advancement of covenant faithfulness across generations.

12. Long-Term Vision

Heritage Covenant Church seeks to cultivate a culture in which Christian education is valued, pursued, and supported. Over time, the church desires to see the development of strong educational networks, the training of future leaders and teachers, and the potential establishment of confessionally Reformed Christian schools.

This vision is rooted in a desire for generational faithfulness, where children are raised to know, love, and serve the Lord in every area of life.

13. Integration with the Mission of the Church

Christian education is central to the mission of the church, which is to make disciples of Jesus Christ through the means of grace. The local church is essential to this work, as it is the place where believers are gathered, nurtured, and equipped for life and service.

Through the faithful teaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the life of the covenant community, the church seeks to raise up mature believers who will live out their faith in their families, vocations, and communities.

14. Pastoral Care

Because Christian education is part of covenant faithfulness, the church takes seriously its responsibility to shepherd families in this area. If a family persistently neglects the Christian formation of their children or embraces an approach to education that clearly contradicts the teaching of Scripture, the elders may provide instruction, counsel, and loving exhortation to encourage greater faithfulness to God's Word and to the covenant responsibilities they have undertaken.

At the same time, the elders will carefully consider the particular circumstances of each family, recognizing that factors such as location, access to resources, financial limitations, special educational needs, and other unique situations may affect educational decisions. Oversight in this area will therefore be exercised with wisdom, patience, and pastoral sensitivity, seeking to understand before seeking to correct.

The goal of such shepherding is not to impose uniformity or to create a spirit of legalism, but to cultivate faithfulness within the covenant community. The church does not measure the standing of its members by educational models alone, nor does it regard those facing difficult circumstances as lesser participants in the kingdom of God. Rather, the aim is to walk alongside families, encouraging growth in obedience and trust in the Lord.

All such oversight is exercised pastorally, with the goal of restoration, faithfulness, and the spiritual good of the family, so that both parents and children may grow in their knowledge of Christ and their commitment to live under His Word.

15. Summary Statement

Heritage Covenant Church believes that parents bear the primary responsibility for the education of their children, while the church covenants to assist them through teaching, support, and shepherding. Baptismal vows make Christian education a spiritual obligation, not a matter of preference. The church prioritizes care for the vulnerable, calls pastors to lead by example, and seeks to support families in raising their children in the Lord. The ultimate goal is generational covenant faithfulness, resulting in strong families, a healthy church, and a lasting witness for Christ.