

# CONSTITUTION

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COVENANT REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH  
EASLEY, SC



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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PREAMBLE.....	1
ARTICLE I: NAME .....	1
ARTICLE II: PURPOSE.....	1
ARTICLE III: COVENANT.....	1
ARTICLE IV: ARTICLES OF FAITH .....	2
ARTICLE V: MEMBERSHIP .....	2
ARTICLE VI: CHURCH DISCIPLINE.....	9
ARTICLE VII: ORDINANCES.....	12
ARTICLE VIII: OFFICERS .....	13
ARTICLE IX: CALLING OF AN INTERCHURCH COUNCIL .....	19
ARTICLE X: CHURCH MEETINGS.....	19
ARTICLE XI: CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY .....	20

*This constitution has been edited and adapted from the constitution of the Reformed Baptist Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. The text here is not copyrighted since they express their indebtedness to other churches for many of the insights embodied in this document, as we do to them. We express our gratitude to them for sharing with us the fruit of their labors.*



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# CONSTITUTION COVENANT REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH EASLEY, SC

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## PREAMBLE

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We, the members of Covenant Reformed Baptist Church, do ordain and establish the following Articles, to which we voluntarily and solemnly submit ourselves.

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## ARTICLE I: NAME

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The name of this church shall be Covenant Reformed Baptist Church.

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## ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

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The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures by maintaining and promoting His worship both individually and corporately, by evangelizing sinners, and by edifying His saints. Therefore, we are committed to the proclamation of God's perfect Law and of the glorious Gospel of His grace through all the world, to the defense of that "faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3), and to the pure and faithful celebration of the ordinances of the New Covenant.

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## ARTICLE III: COVENANT

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### A. INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

God has graciously entered into a covenant relationship with His believing people (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Heb. 8:7-13; 10:16-17; 13:20-21). Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6). His blood is the blood of the New Covenant, which infallibly secures all the benefits of the covenant for all of God's people (Matt. 26:26-28; Heb. 13:20,21). God has in this New Covenant made us members one of another (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:25). Therefore, we have covenant responsibilities to each other, as well-as to God. God has promised in this covenant to write His laws in our hearts and to cause us to walk in His ways (that is, to enable us to keep our covenant responsibilities). The motivation and ability to obey God's laws spring from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who, by His death, satisfied the holy wrath of God that was against us due to our sins. It is by the enablement of the Holy Spirit that we obey, in loving gratitude for Christ's righteousness, which has been imputed to us, and not to establish our own righteousness before God. We obey with the confidence that the end of Christ's death will be realized in us [that is, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Rom. 8:1-4) and that we should be a people "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14)]. The following paragraphs are a summary of what we believe are our covenant responsibilities toward God and toward one another. This summary forms the basis for our giving and receiving instruction for ourselves and for our families.

## **B. SUMMARY OF OUR COVENANT RESPONSIBILITIES (THE LAWS WRITTEN IN OUR HEARTS)**

1. We agree to worship only the one true and living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We will declare His glory to the nations. We will have no other gods before Him.
2. We agree to worship God in His appointed way and to exclude from our worship anything that He has not appointed.
3. We agree not to use the name of our God emptily or to take it upon ourselves carelessly, but to walk in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
4. We agree to cease from our own works on the Lord's Day, if they are not works of mercy, piety, or necessity, and to positively sanctify the day by special exercises of public and private worship.
5. We agree to honor and obey, within the bounds of Scripture, all our superiors, whether in family, church, state, or business; and, if we be superiors, to deal reasonably and lovingly with our subordinates and thus to teach them by word and example to fear God and keep His commandments.
6. We agree to avoid whatever tends to destroy us or our neighbors and to engage vigorously in all lawful endeavors to preserve our own lives and the lives of others, especially by ready reconciliation and faithful exhortation in the church.
7. We agree to possess our bodies in holiness as vessels joined to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and to avoid all uncleanness of thought, speech, or action.
8. We agree to be diligent in our vocations, that we may provide for our own households, avoid theft of time, money, or goods, and have to give to him who has need.
9. We agree to earnestly promote truth among men and to avoid anything that would prejudice the truth or injure our neighbor's good name.
10. We agree to be fully content with our own condition in life, to rejoice in the advancement of our neighbor, and to avoid envying him or coveting anything that is his.

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### **ARTICLE IV: ARTICLES OF FAITH**

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We regard the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 [excepting the assertions regarding the salvation of the mentally incompetent (10:3) and the identity of the antichrist (26:4)] as an excellent, though not inspired, expression of the teaching of the Word of God. Because we acknowledge the Word of God written to be the supreme authority in all matters of faith, morals, and order, we adopt this historic document as our doctrinal standard. We find it to be an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness.

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### **ARTICLE V: MEMBERSHIP**

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#### **A. WARRANT FOR MEMBERSHIP**

The New Testament demands of all Christians, formal, open, solemn, voluntary, and enduring commitment to Jesus Christ, to His truth, and to His people. A true Christian's commitment to the Lord

Jesus Christ must include, and is inseparable from, his commitment to Christ's truth and to Christ's people. Such a commitment to Christ, His truth, and His people ordinarily requires a formal, open, solemn, voluntary, and enduring commitment of church membership in a local church for the following biblical reasons:

1. Fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission requires church membership. According to the Great Commission of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20), there is an inseparable connection between making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them. The Apostles implemented this commission by gathering baptized disciples into local churches. It was therefore in local churches that baptized disciples were taught all that Christ commanded (Acts 2:38-42; 1 Cor. 4:17). With the uncertain exception of the Ethiopian eunuch, the New Testament knows nothing of believing men and women who are not members of local churches.
2. Obedience to Christ's directive to observe the Lord's Table requires church membership. Since all believing men and women are required by Christ to observe the Lord's Table (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-25), and since the Lord's Table is clearly a local church ordinance [1 Cor. 11:17-18, 33-34 (cp. 1 Cor. 1:1-2)], it follows that all Christians must belong to a local New Testament church in order to partake biblically.
3. The New Testament presents the local church as a distinct group of individuals which could:
  - a) be counted (Acts 2:41-42; 4:4)
  - b) be added to (Acts 2:47; 5:14)
  - c) be called upon to select leaders and representatives from among itself (Acts 6:1-6; 2 Cor. 8:19, 23; Acts 15:22)
  - d) be officially gathered together (Acts 14:27; 15:22)
  - e) carry out church discipline by vote (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6)
  - f) observe the Lord's table as a wholly present corporate assembly (1 Cor. 11:17-20, 33-34)

There is therefore clear biblical warrant for the existence and careful maintenance of local church membership involving formal, open, solemn, voluntary, and enduring commitment. This biblical warrant compels us to use great care in maintaining a biblically-ordered church membership.

## **B. REQUISITES FOR MEMBERSHIP**

1. To be eligible for membership, a man or woman (Acts 5:14; 8:3, 12) must demonstrate repentance toward God and the fruits thereof (Acts 26:20), as well as that faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) that produces godly works (Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:18, 22). He must be baptized as a believer and profess substantial agreement with the purpose (as stated in Article II), Covenant (as stated in Article III), Confessions (as stated in Article IV), and government of this church. Furthermore, he must not be under the biblically warranted (Matt. 18:17, 18; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 3 John 9-10; 2 Cor. 2:6-8) corrective discipline of a genuine church.
2. Church members must be in submission to the ordained rule of the church to which they belong (Heb. 13:17). He who cannot intelligently and freely submit to a church's government should not belong to that church.

3. Anyone who is in substantial disagreement with the constitution or confessions of the church could not be consistently submissive to the church's teaching ministry. Therefore, to admit such a person to membership in this church would be unwise (Eph. 4:3) and unscriptural.
4. Mastery of church confessions is not required of any new disciple before he is admitted to church membership. Such a requirement would violate the order of Matt. 28:19-20, which instructs us to disciple, to baptize, and then to teach the baptized disciple to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. It is necessary, however, that any disciple applying for membership manifest a willingness to be taught and substantial agreement with what he already knows concerning the church's doctrine and government.
5. If one who is already a member of the church at any time concludes that he no longer satisfies the requirements for membership, he is under obligation to inform the elders of that fact.

### **C. TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP**

#### **1. Regular Members**

All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedures set forth in Section D of this Article and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church as set forth in Article VI, shall be considered regular members in good standing and entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church (Acts 2:37-47).

#### **2. Associate Members**

Members of other churches who come to live in our area for a limited period of time (e.g., students, military personnel, persons on special work assignments) may be received into or removed from the membership of the church on the same basis and in the same manner as persons who have permanent residence in our geographical area. Such a person need not be released from the membership of his "home church" but will be regarded as an associate member while in our midst, enjoying all the privileges, with the exception of voting, performing all the duties, and submitting to all the liabilities of regular membership. When such a person terminates his period of temporary residence, he will be released to the fellowship of his "home church" and no longer be regarded as a member of this church (compare Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:1f; Col. 4:10; 3 John 5-10). If such a person decides to live in our area permanently and to end his membership in his former "home church," he may request that he be regarded as a regular member of this church. Such regular membership will begin once his membership in his former "home church" has ended. A letter will be sent to the "home church" informing it of the new status of all who begin or end associate membership in this church.

### **D. RECEPTION INTO MEMBERSHIP**

1. Any person desiring to become a member of the church must submit a written testimony to the elders explaining his understanding and experience of the Gospel of Christ. Exceptions to this requirement shall be determined by the elders in cases involving extraordinary circumstances. The written testimony is intended to promote a proper evaluation of the potential member and to encourage knowledgeable fellowship with him. The elders may request further clarification and/or expansion of this written testimony before proceeding with the application process.
2. If the applicant has been a member of another church, the elders will investigate his standing in that church before he is accepted as a member in this church. Where it is possible and appropriate, a letter of transfer will be requested. Reception by transfer does not negate any of the requirements for becoming a member in this assembly.



3. Upon the reception of an acceptable written testimony, the elders may at their discretion ask for a preliminary meeting with the applicant; otherwise, the name of the applicant shall be announced for at least three consecutive Lord's Days at stated meetings of the church. This time period is for the purpose of enabling the members to read his testimony and to raise any questions or objections concerning the applicant's qualifications. Members are expected to consider this a personal duty of the most serious character. They are expected to voice privately to the elders all questions or objections that have not yet been resolved, after personal contact has been made with the applicant (Matt. 18:15ff; Lev. 19:16-17). During the application process, the applicant will be interviewed. During the interview the elder(s) will seek to clarify any questions the applicant may have concerning the church or church membership. They shall also determine whether or not that person meets the qualifications as stated in Article V, Section B, of the Constitution and, if necessary, resolve any questions or objections raised by the church. The elders may postpone the reception of the person into membership until any objections can be resolved. If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the qualifications, the person will be received at a stated meeting of the church (Matt. 3:6-12; Acts 9:26-27; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2).

#### **E. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP**

##### 4. Types of Termination

###### a) By Physical Death

When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall be transferred to the file of former members.

###### b) By Transfer

1) Because the New Testament norm for Christians is that they be members of true local churches of Christ, and because the spiritual health of believers is endangered when they are not thus committed to a church, any Christian who leaves the membership of this church should seek to do so by means of transfer to another true church of Christ. Therefore, if a church member in good standing whose conduct does not warrant corrective discipline desires to leave the membership of this church, he is strongly urged to leave in an orderly way by privately indicating that desire to the elders along with his reasons for leaving and by submitting a request to the elders for a transfer of membership to another true church of Christ.

2) When such a departing member has not yet chosen a suitable church to which he may transfer, the elders may provide, if he wishes, for a transitional period which will allow the departing member to decide where he wishes to be transferred. Such a transitional status will be allowed to continue as long as the departing member maintains regular contact with the elders, does not unnecessarily prolong the transitional process, and does not engage in conduct requiring the exercise of church discipline.

3) When it is so requested, the elders may transfer a departing member of good standing to the fellowship of another church. A letter of transfer will be sent to the appropriate officer(s) of the church to which the member wishes to transfer. No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is in their judgment disloyal to "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) or which does not exercise godly care over its members.

### c) By Dismission

1) Occasionally, a person's membership may need to be terminated under circumstances which make both transfer and corrective discipline inappropriate. In such circumstances a member may be dismissed.

2) While there is no explicit precedent for dismission in the New Testament, it is required by biblical principles, including the voluntariness of local church membership (Acts 5:13; 9:26; 1 John 2:19) and the demands of biblically defined love and justice (Lam. 3:31-33; 1 Cor. 13:4a, 5a, 7a; Prov. 17:15; 18:5); and by the exigencies of a church not yet wholly redeemed and facing the results of nearly 2000 years of church history.

3) Dismission may be initiated either by the written request of a member to the elders, or by the elders themselves when a member ceases to maintain vital contact with this church. In either case, the final decision regarding the action of dismission will lie with the elders. Church membership is a very serious matter. Members, therefore, shall be dismissed only after due inquiry and admonition by the elders, whenever such contact is possible. Before any individual is dismissed, the church shall be informed of the intention of the elders to dismiss the individual. This information must include the grounds for the proposed dismission. A suitable period of time following the announcement shall be given for the church to privately raise concerns with the elders. After due consideration of such concerns, the elders may proceed with dismission. When possible, they shall send a letter to the dismissed individual informing him of his dismission. The elders shall subsequently communicate to the church that the person has been dismissed. If one who has been dismissed applies again for membership, the normal procedures shall be followed as forth in Section D of this Article.

4) Dismission may be warranted for any of the following reasons:

(a) A member in good standing concludes that he is not truly saved.

(b) A member in good standing wishes to terminate his membership for reasons that do not impugn his Christian profession.

(c) A member ceases to maintain vital contact with this church due to relocation or other unique circumstances.

### d) By Excommunication

According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a church must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false and heretical doctrine, or who blatantly or persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church (Matt. 18:15ff; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Article VI, Section B, of this Constitution.

## 5. Implications of Termination

a) Covenant Reformed Baptist Church does not exist in isolation from, but is part of the universal church of Christ, composed of all true churches. Accordingly, open and forthright communication among the churches is vital for the purity, peace, edification and unity of the church universal. Therefore the elders may, at their discretion, disclose to the members of

this church and to other churches the circumstances under which a person's member was terminated (Acts 15:24; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:10; 1 John 2:18-19).

- b) In addition, Covenant Reformed Baptist Church does not exist in isolation from society at large. Accordingly, this church has a moral obligation to society both to act with integrity and to maintain its testimony (2 Cor. 8:20-21). Therefore, the elders may, at their discretion disclose to other persons outside the ecclesiastical circles mentioned above circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Lev. 5:1; Prov. 29:24; 1 Pet. 4:15).
- c) Termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, spread false teachings or reports, or engage in any other behavior which threatens the peace and unity of this church or the church universal. Accordingly, when it is established that a former member is behaving divisively, the elders may issue whatever warnings they deem appropriate to maintain and preserve the peace and harmony of this church and the church universal (Acts 15:24; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:10; 1 John 2:18-19).

## **F. PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP**

In God's order, commitment normally constitutes the pathway to the possession of privileges. Therefore, membership in this church includes the following privileges:

1. Participation in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42; 1 Cor. 11:18-26, 33);
2. Attendance at, appropriate participation in, and voting during church business meetings [Acts 6:1-6 (cp. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:13-14); 1 Cor. 5:4-7; 13 (cp. 1 Cor. 1:2)] (The elders may deem it wise not to allow members who are under 18 years of age to attend some meetings. This will be left to the elders' discretion. Also, members under 18 will not be allowed to vote in church business meetings.)<sup>1</sup>;
3. Laboring to extend God's Kingdom in ministries of the church (as one's gifts, graces, and calling make appropriate) [1 Cor. 12:4-27 (cp. 1 Cor. 1:2); Eph. 4:7; 11-12; 16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11];
4. Reception of the committed oversight and care of the pastors of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3);
5. Reception of the committed care and discipline (as needed) of the membership of the church [Acts 6:1-2 (cp. Acts 2:41; 5:13-14; 9:26); 1 Cor. 5:4-5 (cp. 1 Cor. 1:2); Gal. 6:10].

## **G. REQUIREMENTS OF MEMBERSHIP**

6. All the members of this church are required to attend all the stated meetings of the church unless providentially hindered by illness, unusual working conditions that do not violate the Lord's Day, and other such circumstances (Heb. 10:24-25). The stated meetings of the church are as follows:

- a) All services on the Lord's Day (Bible School, morning and evening worship, the Lord's Supper, and baptisms)
- b) Midweek prayer service
- c) Church business meetings

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<sup>1</sup> This paragraph was amended.

d) Any special meetings that the elders shall occasionally deem necessary.

When any member is absent from the above stated meetings, he should inform an elder directly or indirectly of the reason.

7. All the members of the church are required to make use of the various other means of grace that are available to them, such as daily private prayer and systematic reading of the Bible, daily family worship, and a proper reverence for and observance of the Lord's Day.

8. Because it is clearly taught in the Scriptures that Christians should financially support the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate giving made through the local church (Mal. 3:8-10; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9), all the members of this church are expected to conform to this rule of Scripture. The tithe (ten percent of one's gross personal income) is not imposed on the people of God as a tax but is strongly urged upon each member as an expression of worship and the biblical norm for basic giving. Added to this should be gifts and offerings according to one's ability and the willingness of his heart (2 Cor. 8:1-5; Exod. 36:2-7).

9. All the members of this church are required to obey the teachings of Scripture in respect to the life and government of the family. The husband is the God-appointed head of the family and must rule his household with gentleness, love, wisdom, and firmness (Eph. 5:25ff; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:7). The wife must be in Scriptural subjection to her husband in all things (Eph. 5:22-24; 1 Pet. 3:1-6). The husband and wife must bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4). This includes setting a godly example before them, consistently instructing them from the Scriptures (Deut. 6:4-9), and administering corporal chastening to them when needed (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 29:15; Heb. 12:7).

10. It is the duty of every Christian, as an individual and as a member of a local church, to labor by prayer, word, and deed for the extension of the kingdom of God in ever widening circles, beginning at home and stretching forth to the ends of the earth (Isa. 54:1-3; Acts 1:8). Therefore, every member of this church is expected prayerfully to recognize and to seize every opportunity to bear witness to his faith in Christ, both by consistent Christian conduct and by the testimony of his lips.

11. Each member of the church is required to render loyal obedience to all the moral precepts of God's Word in his daily life (Rom. 8:3-4; 1 Cor. 9:20-21; James 2:12). If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in His Word, a Christian is at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God and to glorify Him in all things (1 Pet. 1:17; 1 Cor. 10:31), a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren (1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 15:1-3), a compassion for the lost (1 Cor. 9:19-22), and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul (Rom. 13:14; 1 Cor. 6:12; 9:24-27; Gal. 5:22-23; 1 Pet. 2:16).

12. All who come into the membership of this church are expected to recognize and to submit to the authority of the overseers of the church (1 Cor. 16:15-16; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17). This responsibility will include willingly scheduling an oversight meeting with an elder(s) when requested.

13. We who have been joined to Christ by faith and are members of this church are also members one of another (Rom. 12:5). With this privileged relationship come particular responsibilities. We must maintain mutual transparency and honesty (Eph. 4:25). We must rejoice in each other's honor and bear one another's sorrows (1 Cor. 12:26). We must discreetly confess our faults one to another (James 5:16). We must mutually oversee each other, faithfully admonish and encourage one another, avoid all backbiting and gossip, and keep in strict confidence all matters which the elders determine are of private concern to the church (Prov. 11:13; Matt. 18:15ff; 1 Thess. 5:14-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25).

Also, we must, when necessary, help meet the material needs of our brethren (Gal. 6:10; James 2:14-16; 1 John 3:16-18).

## **H. RECORDS OF MEMBERSHIP**

The elders shall keep a file of all past and present members. This file shall have three divisions: regular members, associate members, and former members. The file of former members shall include the date and reason church membership was terminated, as well as any other necessary information (see Article V, Section D).

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## **ARTICLE VI: CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

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### **A. FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE**

Every disciple (follower) of Christ must be under His discipline (His instruction and correction), which is administered to each one through the church (1 Cor. 12:12-27; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Mutual submission to one another (Eph. 5:21) and to the overseers whom the Lord has set over His church (1 Pet. 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when one's failure to respond to this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

### **B. CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE**

#### 1. General Statement

- a) Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. As a general rule and whenever feasible, an effort must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles given to us in Matt. 18:15-16, Rom. 16:17-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim. 5:19-20, and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and applied to each and every case of corrective discipline as appropriate. In some cases public admonition and/or public repentance may be warranted (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20). In the most extreme cases excommunication from the membership of the church may be necessary (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Tim. 1:20; Titus 3:10). All the members of the church are obliged to submit to and enforce as appropriate the decision of the church in acts of corrective discipline.
- b) Since the church is a spiritual and religious institution, the punishments inflicted by the church in corrective discipline (2 Cor. 6:7) are also spiritual. They include public verbal reproof (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20), social avoidance (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14), suspension from the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 5:11), and removal from the membership of the church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13). They are intended to effect repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame (2 Cor. 2:7; 2 Thess. 3:14). The church has no right, however, to confiscate goods, revoke conjugal rights, or inflict corporal punishment of any kind. Nevertheless, a member guilty of criminal actions may be delivered to the civil authorities according to the rule of Scripture (1 Pet. 4:15).
- c) The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6), and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 5:20).

## 2. Public Reproof or Censure

Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort, before the gathered church, to call an impenitent church member to repentance for sin too blatant to be dealt with in an exclusively private manner; or to deal with serious sin even where there may have been repentance. The elders may administer public censure whenever in their judgment either public misconduct (Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Tim. 5:20), patterns of sin (Titus 1:12-13), or serious doctrinal error (Titus 1:10-13) pose a significant threat to the godliness, unity, or testimony of the congregation. Those who humbly receive the word of public reproof, own and confess their sin, and manifest a transformed life (Prov. 28:13) shall afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance (2 Cor. 7:7-11). If the reproof is not heeded, further discipline may be imposed.

## 3. Suspension

Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness, and testimony of the church that the Lord requires the suspension of some of the privileges of membership (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). In all cases of suspension the offending person is still to be regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church. Therefore, in accordance with the procedures outlined below for each of the five major categories of offenses, the elders shall at a business meeting of the church recommend that the offending member be suspended, specifying its grounds. To be valid, an act of suspension must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, the elders shall have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension upon a member which will bar him from not more than one Lord's Table while they deliberate the most prudent course of action. The major categories of sin which require suspension are as follows:

### a) A Stubborn Private Offender (Matt. 18:15-17)

When a private offense remains unresolved even after the method prescribed by our Lord in Matt. 18:15-16 has been graciously and prayerfully followed, it is considered an aggravated offense. The brethren involved shall bring the matter to the elders who, if they judge the matter to be serious and cannot persuade the brother to repent, shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the stubborn brother be suspended (Matt. 18:17a). If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains adamant in his sin, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article (Matt. 18:17b).

### b) Divisive Teachings or Behavior (Rom. 16:17-20; Titus 3:10)

When after admonition a member persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to the Scripture and our Confessions of Faith, or attempts to sow discord among the membership contrary to the Scripture and this Constitution, he may be suspended as a factious man. Since every member is responsible to help preserve the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1f), no member is to conceal such flagrantly divisive behavior, but rather to reprove it, and disclose it to the elders (Deut. 13:6f; 1 Cor. 1:10-11). Whenever the elders become aware of such divisive behavior, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (1 Cor. 1:10-4:21; Titus 3:10). If, even after receiving repeated admonition from the elders, a member persists in such behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the divisive brother be suspended. If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

c) Disorderly Behavior (2 Thess. 3:6-15)

When a member deliberately persists in conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for either the order appointed by God for all mankind in the creation ordinances, namely, work, Sabbath, and marriage (Gen. 2:1-3, 15, 18-24; Exod. 20:8-11; 1 Cor. 7:1-17, 39; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 2:5) or for the order established by Christ for His church in Scripture (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 14:37-40; 1 Tim. 3:14-15) and adapted to our church in this Constitution, he may be suspended as a disorderly man (2 Thess. 3:6). Whenever the elders become aware that, in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline (1 Thess. 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (2 Thess. 3:14-15). If, even after receiving such admonition from the elders, a member persists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the disorderly brother be suspended (2 Thess. 3:14-15). If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

d) A Scandalous Sin

If a member has sinned scandalously but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the elders, it may still be prudent to suspend him for a time so that he may clearly manifest repentance (Matt. 3:8), so that reproach not be brought upon the Name of Christ and the church (2 Sam. 12:14; Rom. 2:24), and so that others may not be emboldened to sin (1 Tim. 5:20). If fruits worthy of repentance are not forthcoming, the elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

e) Contempt of Church Discipline

If a person is accused or suspected of a sin requiring corrective discipline, yet absents himself from the meetings of the church, or refuses to meet with the elders so that the matter may be investigated, such a person may be suspended (Matt. 18:17; Num. 16:12, 20, 23-27). The elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

4. Excommunication

- a) In addition to the excommunication of those who have been previously suspended, some expressions of sin (ethical or doctrinal) are so gross and heinous in nature that preliminary actions like public reproof and suspension are inappropriate. In such cases, the guilty member may be immediately excommunicated by the church (1 Cor. 5:1-4). This severe measure is to be employed when both aggravated lawlessness is discovered and there are no hopeful signs of repentance. This severe measure is designed to purge the lawbreaker of his lethal attachment to his sin unto a sincere and enduring repentance (1 Cor. 5:5; 6:9-11). The elders, therefore, having made earnest but unsuccessful efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation, shall report the same to the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated.
- b) All acts of excommunication must be executed by the gathered church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4). To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of at least two thirds of the members present and voting.

## 5. Restoration

Since one purpose of church discipline is to restore a fallen brother or sister, it is the duty of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a suspended or excommunicated member who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance (2 Cor. 2:6-8). This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church by no less than two thirds of the members present and voting.

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## ARTICLE VII: ORDINANCES

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### A. GENERAL STATEMENT

There are two ordinances of special significance that our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (These are sometimes referred to as "sacraments.") Neither of them has saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of Baptism or through the bread and the cup of the Supper. These ordinances are not means of "special grace," but they are special "means of grace" and powerful aids to the faith of the believers who participate in them.

### B. BAPTISM

1. Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for Baptism, and all such persons should be baptized and joined to a local church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 5:13-14). Believing that Baptism in water is the God-ordained sign of one's personal union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and the door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, we shall receive into the membership of the church only those who have been baptized as believers "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Immersion in water is the biblical mode of baptism, is necessary for its due administration, and is the only mode to be administered by this church.

2. Occasionally, a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ whose baptism is marked by irregularities of mode may apply for membership in this church. It is according to the mind of Christ that a believer who was baptized by a mode other than immersion should be immersed as a believer. Occasionally, such a believer may be prevented by his conscience from doing this. Therefore, should this be the case, the elders may at their discretion admit such a person if they believe that it is in the best interests of the person and this church. Before such a person is admitted, he must be submissive to instruction on the subject and prove to have a teachable and peaceable spirit with regard to the standards of this church respecting baptism. Should such a member come to agreement with the convictions of this church, he must, then, be immersed.

### C. THE LORD'S SUPPER

Whereas Baptism is the initiatory ordinance by which one enters the visible church, and should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1 Cor. 11:26). While this is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity, the bread and the cup of the Supper are and remain only symbols of the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to maintain the purity of this ordinance, the elders will faithfully seek to insure that only true believers who are members in good standing of true churches are admitted to the Table. True believers whose church membership involves unusual circumstances may be admitted at the discretion of the elders.



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**ARTICLE VIII: OFFICERS**

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**A. GENERAL STATEMENT**

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Col. 1:18). He has ordained that individual churches should be governed by Himself through officers whom He appoints, who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Christ has ordained that local churches are to be administered by elders and deacons. Beside these two offices the Scriptures acknowledge no office which continues in the church today (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

**B. GENERAL PREREQUISITES**

1. All officers of this church must be members of it except as provided in Section H of this Article.
2. Any individual set apart to one of these offices must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's Confessions of Faith and Constitution. If he should at any time move from this position, he would be under spiritual and moral obligation to immediately make that fact known to the elders in an orderly manner.
3. While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given women and the valuable assistance they may render to the officers of the church (Rom. 16:1-6; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11), the Bible prohibits women from holding either the office of deacon or elder in the church (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7). Women, therefore, shall not be nominated, elected, or ordained to either of these offices in the church. It is also contrary to Scripture for any woman to exercise headship or leadership in a formal meeting of the whole church either by leading in prayer, conducting the worship, reading the Scripture, leading the singing, administering the sacraments, or ministering the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15). Since it is also a violation of the Scriptures for a woman to exercise authority over a man in spiritual things outside a meeting of the whole church, no woman shall be appointed to a teaching or authoritative function in a ministry of the church where adult men would be regularly under her ministry. Nevertheless, we acknowledge and encourage the valuable gifts and assistance of women in the formal instruction of children and other women (Titus 2:3-5), in the informal instruction even of men (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 18:26), and in the diaconal and especially the benevolent ministries of the church (1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9-10).

**C. ELDERS**

1. Those who have been called of God to rule and teach in the church are called elders, pastors, or bishops. These are three interchangeable names designating one and the same office in a New Testament church (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11-12; Titus 1:5, 7).
2. Anyone desiring the office of an elder must evidence to God's people the personal, domestic, and ministerial qualifications that are set forth in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).
3. Because the authority of the elders of the church is human authority exercised in the house of God, it has both high prerogatives and important limitations:
  - a) It is divinely-delegated authority. Thus, elders are answerable to God for the exercise of this authority (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). Therefore, elders are obligated to discharge all of the duties specified by God in the Scriptures (particularly in such passages as Acts 20:17, 28ff; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; and Heb. 13:17).

- b) When they exercise this authority by requiring obedience to themselves, they must seek to gain the consciences of God's people through the ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11c; 1 Tim. 3:2c; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17).
  - c) The authority of the elders does not include the right to make certain decisions unilaterally. In major decisions of church life (such as those having to do with corrective discipline, recognition of officers, and the sale of a church building), the local church as a whole has a voice (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 13; 2 Cor. 2:6). Yet the elders' must provide definitive leadership to the church in the making of such decisions.
  - d) The authority of the elders is limited to the sphere of the local church. Thus, they will not require punishments for sin beyond those of biblical church discipline, will not invade the biblically-defined spheres of other divinely-ordained human authorities (husbands, fathers, civil rulers, and employers), and will not command God's people regarding matters not specified in Scripture except to order the house of God by the application of His Word (Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3a; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Cor. 7:25-28; 35-40).
  - e) The authority of elders is conditioned by the fact that they are themselves members of the local church. While elders are shepherds over the flock, they are also members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is entitled to the same privileges, is obligated by the same responsibilities, and is subject to the same discipline as are all the other members of the church. Thus, each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and accountable to the church as a whole (Matt. 18:17; 23:9; 26:31; 2 Cor. 11:19-20; Gal. 2:11; 3 John 1, 9, 10). (However, Section I of this Article does provide for the temporary advice of elders from a sister church who would not be members of this particular local church.)
  - f) The authority of every elder (or pastor) is the same. Thus, every elder has equal rule in the church. Though gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from elder to elder, this diversity must not undermine real parity among the elders [Acts 20:28 (cp. 17); Gal 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17].
  - g) Finally, the authority of the elders is very real authority. God's people are, therefore, required to submit when it is biblically exercised (Heb. 13:17; note also the Scriptural titles and functions of the office).
4. One crucial aspect of the elders' duties is personally overseeing the flock of God. Fulfillment of this duty shall include regularly and systematically meeting with each member of the church on at least an annual basis, except when physically impossible due to distance.
  5. Elders will be maintained in material necessities and disentangled from the cares of another vocation according to their gifts, the needs and capability of the church, and the direction of Christ her Head (1 Tim. 5:17ff).
  6. Though a plurality of elders is the New Testament norm for every church, the New Testament does not specify the number of elders each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an elder's term of office. One truly called to this office is usually called to it for life. He is a gift of Christ to the church, and the gifts of God are without repentance. Only when an elder fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from being an elder.

## D. DEACONS

1. Deacons are responsible primarily to administer the benevolent concerns of the church as well as its business affairs (Acts 6:1-4). They must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders.
2. The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall set apart according to its need men who evidence the scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

## E. APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS<sup>2</sup>

### 1. General Statement

The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, He has ordained that each local church exercise the responsibility of recognizing those whom He is appointing to be elders and deacons in that particular church. Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (1 Tim. 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (1 Tim. 5:22). Therefore, each officer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership in particular. The Lord's appointment of an individual to either of these offices is recognized by means of that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for the particular office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never be dealt with without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered. Each member of the church has a spiritual responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

### 2. Procedure of Appointment

The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church is executed in three steps: nomination, election, and ordination.

#### a) Nomination

Nominations to either office are made by the eldership. At least once every year at the annual business meeting an advisory ballot shall be taken. On this ballot each voting member may write the name of any male members and the office for which he believes that member to be qualified.

#### b) Election

Any church meeting for the election of officers shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days previous to its being held. The names of all nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the nominee's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the nominee. The church should seek unity of mind concerning each nominee, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election. This vote shall take place by written ballot subsequent to a full

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<sup>2</sup> Paragraphs E, F, and H were amended in 2015.

and free discussion oriented to the relevant Scriptural passages. The vote shall stand as it is first given in the written ballot.

c) Ordination

Following the election of an officer, there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer shall be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the eldership. This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the whole church (Acts 13:1-3). The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer-elect. Should the elders be unable to conscientiously ordain an officer-elect (1 Tim. 5:22), they shall inform each member of their reasons in an appropriate manner.

## F. REVIEW OF OFFICERS

1. Officers shall hold office only as long as they meet the biblical qualifications for their office in the esteem of the church.
2. There may arise reasons that would require an officer to be reviewed. Such a review meeting may be called by a majority of the elders (or a majority of the other elders in the case of an elder). The members may also request such a meeting. This request must be set forth in writing with the signatures of one-third of the total voting membership of the church. It must be presented to the elders, who shall in a timely and constitutional way (see Paragraph 3 below) call such a meeting.
3. Any meeting for the review of an officer shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days previous to its being held. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the officer's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the officer. Any member who publicly suggests in such a meeting that the officer being reviewed is unqualified for his office must have previously spoken with the officer himself and informed the elders of the church of his concerns (1 Tim. 5:19). He must also present biblical and factual warrant for his concerns at the review meeting. Just as it is wrong for a church to retain an officer who is not biblically qualified, so also it is rebellion against the head of the church to reject an officer for any but biblical grounds. Additionally, any officer about whom such concerns are raised must be permitted, if he wishes, to defend himself. The church should seek unity of mind concerning the matter, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for the confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing of confirmation no longer holds office in the church. This vote shall take place by written ballot, and the vote shall stand as it is first given in the written ballot.
4. An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion and for good and valid reasons. This resignation together with its reasons and the date upon which he wishes his resignation to be effective shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the Church.

## G. THE DISCIPLINE OF ELDERS

1. The Warrant for the Discipline of Elders

While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder, as an individual, is under the oversight of his fellow elder(s) and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church.

## 2. The Procedure for the Discipline of Elders

The process of discipline may be initiated either by the elders or by individual members of the congregation. In the case of a private offense any individual member who is offended by what he or she believes to be sinful behavior on the part of any church officer should first approach that officer privately and express his or her concerns. If the concerns are not resolved, the member should inform the elders of the situation and wait upon them in their determination of the matter.

Since this is such a delicate and serious matter, the elders shall proceed with due caution and earnest prayer. If the elders, after looking into and addressing the matter, judge public discipline to be necessary, they shall inform the congregation of the basis for the proposed discipline. In accordance with the guidelines set forth in Article VI, B the form of discipline recommended may be either public reproof, suspension, or excommunication. As in any act of discipline involving either suspension or excommunication, in order to be valid it must have the approval of a least two-thirds of the members present and voting. An act of suspension or excommunication automatically includes immediate removal from office. If the form of discipline is public reproof alone, the officer may possibly retain his office if he humbly receives the word of reproof, owns and confesses his sin, and the behavior for which he was reproved is deemed as not being characteristic. In such a case the officer must receive a vote of confidence by no less than three-fourths majority of the members present and voting in a duly called meeting for that purpose in accordance with the procedures set forth in Article VII, F ,3.

It is agreed that a single eldership is an abnormal condition and, as such, calls for special measures when a conflict arises between the single elder and a member of the congregation. As in a plurality, any member who is offended at the private behavior of the elder should first approach the elder privately and express his or her concerns as directed by Matthew 18:15ff. However, if unresolved, no such matter is to be brought before the church in any kind of disciplinary proceedings unless the following procedures are followed in order to protect the vulnerability of the single elder, safeguard the office, and provide that elder that which every member of the church enjoys: the protection and care of a pastor. It is assumed according to Article VII, I, 2 that the church will already have established an official advisory relationship with another eldership so long as this church has only one elder, therefore the accused elder and the offended church member shall together, or either one may personally, seek the assistance and counsel of the recognized advisory eldership to look into and address the matter and to determine whether disciplinary actions ought to be recommended and if so to prescribe the manner and the extent to which the church ought to be informed. If the assisting eldership believes that public disciplinary actions of some kind are necessary, they will be allowed to give that recommendation to the church in a duly constitutionally called meeting of the members. The discipline recommended may be enacted by the congregation by vote in accordance with the procedures outlined in the above.

## H. FULL SUPPORT OF ELDERS

1. Though all elders are equal as to the authority of their office, not all elders possess qualifications warranting full financial support in the office. The Bible teaches that special ability in ruling the church and, more especially, in public teaching and preaching are gifts worthy of full financial support (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). Thus, before it undertakes his full support, the church must recognize that an elder or nominee to the eldership possesses special ministerial gifts and that he is excelling in the employment of those gifts for the benefit of the church, in ways appropriate to his opportunities. Special caution should be exercised in giving full support to an elder for the following reasons: (1) full support necessitates his removal from a secular vocation, which, in the interests of Christ's Kingdom and of his family, might be a more advantageous position for him to occupy; (2) a major portion of the church's financial stewardship is involved, for which its Head will hold it accountable; and (3) a

fully supported elder has a greater influence upon the church, for good or ill. The provisions of this Section apply to any proportion of financial support required by an increase of ministry that would hinder an elder's full-time employment in a secular vocation.

2. The elders may recommend to the church that an existing elder or a nominee to the eldership be fully supported.

a) In the case of a nominee, full support may be considered in conjunction with the consideration of his qualifications for the eldership. In such a case, the elders will inform the church of their recommendation when the business meeting for this purpose is announced. A distinct discussion and vote for both election to the office and full support in the office is not necessary.

b) In the case of an existing elder who is being recommended for full support, a church meeting to consider this recommendation shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. Such a recommendation may be considered in conjunction with the review of the elder involved. A distinct discussion and vote for both confirmation in the office and full support in the office is not necessary.

3. During any meeting where full support is being considered, special attention shall be given to the relevant teaching of Scripture (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). Such discussion must at all times reflect the fear of God, the claims of truth, and the gravity of the matter. Any vote upon full support requires three-fourths of those ballots cast for approval.

4. The full support of elders as well as their continuation in office will be subject to review (see Section F). Normally a review of full support will take place in conjunction with the review of an elder's qualification for office, whether at regular intervals or at special review meetings. However, circumstances may arise in which an elder's full support may need to be reviewed as an issue separate from his continuation in office. In such cases, a review shall follow the applicable procedures outlined in Paragraphs 2 and 3 above. Continuance of full support shall require three-fourths of the ballots cast.

### **I. LOSS OF A PLURALITY OF ELDERS<sup>3</sup>**

1. This Constitution assumes, and the norms of biblical church order require, that a plurality of elders oversee this local church. Therefore, if at any period in the life of the church, there no longer exists a plurality of elders in office, and this lack cannot in a timely way be supplied, the remaining elder (or the church, if there are no elders) shall seek a formal pastoral advisory relationship with the pastors of a trusted sister church holding as its doctrinal standard the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. The purposes of such an arrangement are to provide the church and/or single elder with pastoral advice. Such an arrangement is purely voluntary and may be terminated unilaterally by either party. Moreover, any counsel offered by the advisory church should not be viewed as authoritative but merely as advisory in nature.

2. When an eldership meeting this requirement and willing to undertake these responsibilities is located, the church shall within a reasonable period of time establish this formal relationship. This action shall be taken by a written ballot at a properly called meeting of the church. A three-fourths majority of those present and voting is necessary for such an action. The recognition of this formal advisory relationship with another eldership shall be confirmed (or failing a three-fourths majority

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<sup>3</sup> This paragraph was amended in 2010.

withdrawn) in the same way at the annual meeting of the church in succeeding years. When a plurality of resident elders is raised up, the formal advisory relationship here described shall immediately cease.

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#### **ARTICLE IX: CALLING OF AN INTERCHURCH COUNCIL**

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If at any point difficulties or differences arise in the church, either in point of doctrine, administration, or discipline that are not already provided for in this constitution and are deemed of such a nature as to render it wise for the preservation of peace and unity in the fellowship and the maintaining of a good testimony before our sister churches, the church may decide to call a council of pastors from other churches of like confessional commitment (1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith) and practice to give counsel in accordance with Ch. 26 para. 15 of our confession of faith. The procedures for the calling of such a council and the determining of who shall be on it are as follows:

1. Such a council may be called at the request of the membership. This request must be set forth with the signatures of at least one-third of the total voting membership of the church. The request shall include the names of those pastors that are desired to sit on the council. There must be at least three but may be more. The request must be presented to the elders who shall in a timely and constitutional way call for a meeting of the church. The church shall then consider and vote upon the recommendation. There must be a two-thirds majority of the voting members in favor of the recommendation for it to pass and for a council therefore to be called.
2. Such a council may be called by a majority of the elders (or the elder and advisory elders in the case of a single elder). The elders shall agree among themselves regarding the pastors who are asked to sit on the council. There must be at least three but there may be more. Such a council may be called by the elders to give advice on private issues known only to the elders themselves or to give advice on public issues involving and communicated to the whole church body.

If such a council is called by the members, or if called by the elders with respect to public issues involving and communicated to the whole church body, the advice given by the council shall be presented to the members of the church in writing, and if requested by this church's elders, may be presented verbally by a spokesman(men) for the council as well, at a duly constitutionally called meeting of the church for that purpose. The week following, the church shall vote as to whether to embrace and implement the advice given. This would require a two-thirds majority.

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#### **ARTICLE X: CHURCH MEETINGS**

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##### **A. THE ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING**

An annual business meeting of the church shall be held in January or February of each year. At this annual meeting the advisory nominations ballot shall be taken (see Article VIII, E, 2, a). A report shall be given by the elders, which shall contain an account of the membership of the church. The status of those whose membership involves unusual circumstances will be reviewed. A financial report for the previous year and the proposed budget for the coming year shall also be presented. These reports including the proposed budget shall be approved by a vote of the church.

##### **B. THE OCCASIONAL BUSINESS MEETINGS**

Church business meetings may be called by the pastors or when one-fourth (1/4) of the voting members make a written request for such a meeting. This request must state the reason for the meeting, be signed by one-fourth (1/4) of the members in good standing, and must be presented to the pastors, who shall in turn make the proper announcement of the meeting. Every meeting at which business is to

be transacted shall be announced at regular services for at least two (2) successive Sundays. Other business meetings at which there is no business transacted by vote may be called at the discretion of the pastors without previous notice.

### **C. VOTING**

All members except those suspended by a vote of the church shall constitute the voting membership of the church (Article VI, B, 3). All voting members should regard their presence at a duly called church meeting with the same seriousness with which they would regard their attendance at a stated service of worship. It shall be our goal to prayerfully discern the mind of God so that in all matters of church business it may be said of us, as it was said of that church business meeting recorded in Acts 6, that this thing “pleased the whole multitude.” However, in situations in which this unanimity is not realized, no less than a two-thirds (2/3) majority of those voting will make a resolution valid. In other matters wherein the Constitution requires a different proportionate vote, this two-thirds (2/3) figure will be overridden by the express statements of the Constitution regarding those categories of business. The voting members present at any properly convened meeting of the church shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The elders shall cancel any previously announced business meeting of the church if through an act of God (such as inclement weather) an unusually large proportion of the members of the church cannot be present.

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## **ARTICLE XI: CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY**

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### **A. NATURE**

This Constitution, as with any other non-inspired document, is not infallible. It does, however, reflect an earnest and sincere attempt to apply the Scriptures in ordering the life of this local church. Furthermore, we as members of this church, including the elders, have solemnly committed ourselves to follow this Constitution in ordering the life of this church (see the Preamble). Therefore the demands of the ninth commandment, and the sanctity of truth in general, require that the elders and all of the members of this church abide by our mutual commitment.

### **B. DEFICIENCIES**

Only when we must obey God rather than the provisions of this Constitution may its requirements be disregarded (Acts 5:29). If at any time a member of this church becomes aware that adherence to this Constitution would violate biblical principle, he should make this known to the elders. If the elders conclude that biblical principle requires disregarding a provision of this Constitution, they are obligated to communicate this together with the reason(s) for their conclusion to the church within one month at a duly called meeting of the church. Furthermore, relevant amendments to this Constitution must be submitted to the church and acted upon in accordance with the provisions of Section C within one year following this informational meeting. The failure of the elders to observe these requirements will constitute a legitimate reason for the calling of a special meeting by the members of the church in accordance with Article X, Section B.

### **C. AMENDMENTS**

Amendments to this Constitution may be adopted by three-fourths of those voting at any regular church meeting or at a special meeting called for this purpose provided, in either case, that such proposed amendments shall be distributed in written form to the membership at least four (4) weeks prior to such a meeting.



COVENANT REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

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