



The Constitution of
Harbor Reformed Baptist Church



Revised January 20, 2019

Preamble

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

Article 1: Name

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

Article 2: Purpose

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 the lost, and by building up His saints (Matthew 28:18-20). Therefore, we are committed to:

- Proclaiming the glorious Gospel of Christ’s grace and mercy,
- making disciples of our Lord Jesus through all the world,
- teaching them to observe all that He has commanded,
- defending that “faith which was once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and
- celebrating purely and faithfully the ordinances of the New Covenant.

Article 3: Covenant

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 success-

fully secures all the benefits of the covenant for all of God’s people (Matt. 26:26-28; Heb. 13:20, 21). In this New Covenant God has 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 on 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 law 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. The Holy Spirit enables us to 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 for 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 carelessly but to live holy and godly lives for His name’s sake.
4. We agree to conscientiously rest from our work on the Lord’s Day, and to specially sanctify the day by activities of public worship and spiritual refreshment.
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 to teach them by word and example to love and obey God.
6. We agree to avoid whatever tends to harm us or our neighbors and to actively pursue the preserving of our own lives and the lives of others, especially by willingly reconciling with, and faithfully advising and counseling, one another in the church.
7. We agree to control our bodies in holiness as vessels joined to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and to avoid all impurity of thought, speech, or action.
8. We agree to be diligent in our vocations that we may provide for our own families, avoid theft of time, money, or goods, and have something to give to him who has need.
9. We agree to sincerely promote truth among men and to avoid anything that would undermine the truth or injure our neighbor’s good name.
10. We agree to strive to be 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.

Article 4 - Articles of Faith

We regard the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (except the assertions regarding the salvation of the mentally incompetent [10:3] and the identity of the antichrist [26:4]) and the Canons of Dort (excluding Article 17 of the first head of doctrine) as excellent, though not inspired, expressions 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 these two historic documents as our doctrinal standards. We find them to be an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of growth in grace.

Article 5 - Membership

A. Justification for Membership

The New Testament calls all Christians to formal, open, solemn, voluntary, and enduring commitment to Jesus Christ, to His truth, and to His people. Such a commitment to Christ, His truth, and His people ordinarily calls for a formal, open, solemn, voluntary and enduring commitment of church membership in a local church for the following reasons:

- 1. Fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission calls for 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. Therefore, it was 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 is unfamiliar with the status of believing men and women who are not members of local churches.
- 2. Participation in the Lord's Table assumes church membership. Since all believing men and women are commanded 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 should belong to a local New Testament church.
- 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 justification for the existence and careful maintenance of local church membership involving formal, open, solemn, and voluntary commitment. This biblical justification compels us to use great care in maintaining a biblically-ordered church membership.

B. Essentials for Membership

- 1. To be eligible for membership, a man or woman (Acts 5:14; 8:3, 12) must display repentance (Acts 26:20), and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) which produces godly works (Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:18, 22). He must be baptized as a believer and share 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. Also, he must not be under the biblically justified (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 established 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 consistently submit 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 the church admits him into 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 Christ has commanded. It is necessary, however, that any disciple applying for membership display 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 obliged 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 expressed in Section D of this Article and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church as expressed in Article VI, will 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, etc.) 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 among us. He will enjoy all the privileges, perform all the duties, and submit to all the liabilities of regular membership. When such a person ends 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. The elders encourage any person desiring to become a member of the church to submit a written testimony to them explaining his understanding and experience of the Gospel of Christ. The elders may make exceptions to this at their discretion. A written testimony is intended to promote a proper evaluation of the potential member and to encourage personal fellowship with him. The elders may request further clarification and/or expansion of this written testimony before moving forward with the application process.

2. If the applicant has been a member of another church, the elders will consider his standing in that church before he becomes a member in this church. Where it is possible and appropriate, the elders will request a letter of transfer. Reception by transfer does not negate any of the essentials for becoming a member in this assembly.

3. The elders will arrange an interview meeting with the applicant. Personal matters of the faith and the life of the applicant and of the church will be discussed. The elders will also determine whether 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. When the elders are satisfied with the personal testimony and the doctrinal convictions of the candidate, the name of the applicant will 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 familiarize themselves with the applicant and to raise any questions or objections concerning the applicant's qualifications. Members are expected to seriously consider this a personal duty. Should any concerns arise, members 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). 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

1. Types of Termination

a. By physical death

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

b. By transfer

(1) Because the New Testament norm for Christians is that they should be members of true local churches of Christ, and because the spiritual health of believers is endangered when they are not committed to a church, any Christian who leaves the membership of this church should seek to do so by transfer to another faithful church. Therefore, if a church member in good standing whose conduct does not call for 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. The elders will allow such a transitional status 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 a member requests it, 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)

c. By Dismissal

(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 dismissal 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), 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 necessities of a church not yet wholly redeemed.

(3) Dismissal 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 dismissal will lie with the elders. Church membership is a very serious matter. Members, therefore, shall be dismissed only after wise inquiry and caution by the elders, whenever such contact is possible. Before any individual is dismissed, the elders shall inform the church of the intention of the elders to dismiss the individual. This information must include the grounds for the proposed dismissal. 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 dismissal. When possible, they shall send a letter to the dismissed individual informing him of his dismissal. 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 expressed in Section D of this Article.

(4) Dismissal may be appropriate for such reasons as:

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

(b) 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. 5:1f; Rom 16:17; Titus 3:10, 11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is expressed in Article 6, Section B, of this Constitution.

2. Implications of Termination

a. Harbor 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 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 membership was terminated (Acts 15:24; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:10; 1 John 2:18, 19).

b. In addition, Harbor 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 church circles mentioned above the 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 think 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]);
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, shepherding, 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. Obligations of Membership

1. All the members of this church are strongly encouraged to attend the stated meetings of the church on Sunday (Heb. 10:24, 25). The stated meetings of the church are as follows:
 - a. Sunday School hour, worship services, the Lord's Supper, and baptisms;
 - b. Church business meetings; and
 - c. Any special meetings that the elders may occasionally call.

2. All the members of the church are strongly encouraged to attend the midweek prayer meeting.

3. All the members of the church do commit to make use of the various other means of grace that are available to them, such as regular private prayer and systematic reading of the Bible, regular family worship, and a proper remembering and observing of the Lord's Day.

4. 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 will seek to live by this rule of Scripture. The tithe (ten percent of one's personal income) is not imposed on the people of God as a tax but is strongly urged on each member as an expression of grateful worship and the biblical norm for basic giving. Added to this should also be cheerful gifts and offerings according to one's ability and the willingness of his heart (2 Cor. 8:1-5; Exod. 36:2-7; 2 Cor 9:7).

5. All the members of this church do commit to submit to 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 discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4). This includes setting a godly example before them, along with consistently instructing and disciplining them according to the Scriptures (Deut. 6:4-9; Prov. 29:15; Heb. 12:7).

6. 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 to the ends of the earth (Isa. 54:1-3; Acts 1:8). Therefore, every member of this church will seek 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.

7. Each member of the church does commit 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), by a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren (1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 15:1-3), by a compassion for the lost (1 Cor. 9:19-22), and by an eager 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).

8. All who come into the membership of this church will recognize and submit to the authority of the pastors of the church (1 Cor. 16:15, 16; 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:17). This responsibility will include willingly scheduling a pastoral care session with an elder (s) when requested.

9. 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 counsel 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 Thes. 5:14, 15; Heb. 3:12, 13; 10:24, 25). Also, we must, when necessary, help meet the material needs of our brothers and sisters (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 5, Section D).

Article 6 - Church Discipline

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 Thes. 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 warning 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 Thes. 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 called for (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 corrections 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 Thes. 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 bring about repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame (2 Cor. 2:7; 2 Thes. 3:14). The church has no right, however, to confiscate goods, revoke marital 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 display a transformed life (Prov. 28:13) will 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 el-

ders shall have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension on 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 brothers or sisters involved shall bring the matter to the elders who, if they judge the matter to be sinful and serious enough, and cannot persuade the brother to repent, will 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 stubbornly entrenched in his sin, excommunication will be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4b of this Article (Matt 18:17b).

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

When after warning or reproof, 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 divisive 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 warning or reproof 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 will be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4b 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 biblical order, righteousness, holiness, or purity (Ex. 20:1-17; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Cor. 7:1-17, 39; 1 Thes. 4:1-8; 2 Thes. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 2:5; Heb. 10:25); 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 Thes. 3:6). Whenever the elders become aware that, in spite of the warnings and reproofs of formative discipline (1 Thes. 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they will confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (2 Thes. 3:14, 15). If, even after receiving such warning from the elders, a member per-

sists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the disorderly brother be suspended (2 Thes. 3:14, 15). If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication will be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4b 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 display 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 the member does not display fruits worthy of repentance, the elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4b 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 aggravated in nature that preliminary actions like public reproof and suspension are inappropriate. In such cases, the church may immediately excommunicate the guilty member (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, toward 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, will report the same to the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated.

b. The gathered church must execute all acts of excommunication (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 and privilege 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 properly convened business meeting of the church by no less than two thirds of the members present and voting.

ARTICLE 7 - ORDINANCES

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. Believer's baptism by immersion in normative

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 normally 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 proper administration, and is the only mode to be administered by this church.

2. Conscience exception to immersion

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 sound biblical principle that a believer who was baptized by a mode other than immersion should be immersed as a believer (Acts 19:1-5). Occasionally, however, 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 regarding the standards of this church respecting baptism. Should such a member come to agreement with the convictions of this church, he should, then, be immersed.

3. Infant baptism exceptions to immersion

Occasionally, a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ whose baptism was of the infant-baptism perspective may apply for membership in this church. Such applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

a. Infant baptism exception in case of marriage

It is according to sound biblical principle that born-again married partners be joined to the same local church, and that the infant-baptistic spouse of a believer-baptist be a member with his/her spouse in the same congregation (Matt. 18:15-17; 19:4-6; Acts 2:47; Rom 14:22-23; 1 Pet. 3:7).

b. Infant baptism exception in case of conscience

It may also be according to sound biblical principle for this church to receive into its membership certain infant-baptistic born-again saints who for good and wise reasons, petition this local church for membership (Mark 9:40; Acts 9:26-27; 18:24-26).

c. Infant baptism membership notes

In either case as previously described, should such an infant-baptistic person petition the church for membership, 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. However, the infant-baptistic member would not be privileged to hold office in the 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 regarding the standards of this church respecting baptism. Should such a member come to agreement with the convictions of this church, he should, then, be baptized by immersion (Acts 19:1-5).

4. Baptism of young people

Regarding the baptism of young people, the elders will prayerfully discern, on a case-by-case basis, the level of spiritual maturity in any given candidate (see Article 5, D, 3). It is uncommon for the elders to approve for baptism, and its accompanying membership, a person under the age of 12.

Any baptized member must be at least 18 years old to vote on church business. The membership of any young person under the age of 18 includes all the rights, privileges, obligations, and accountability of any other member, except for that of voting on church business.

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 assembled church should celebrate the Lord's Supper frequently (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 ensure 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. The Lord's Supper will be celebrated by the church no less than once every month.

ARTICLE 8 - OFFICERS

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 and 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).

C. 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 substantial 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 does not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority in the church above a man (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7). Women, therefore, shall not be nominated, elected, or ordained to either the office of elder or deacon in the church. 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 especially in the benevolent and service ministries of the church (Romans 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9, 10).

C. Elders

1. Those that 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 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).

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 shepherding the flock of God. Fulfillment of this duty will 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 may commonly, though not necessarily, be called to it for life. There is no dishonor in voluntarily stepping down from, or leaving the office, at the end of a period of time. 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 will not be fixed. The church will set apart according to its need men who evidence the scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

3. As with the office of elder, there is no dishonor for a qualified deacon to step down at the end of a period of time, or due to providential hindrances to his fulfilling the responsibilities of the office.

E. Appointment of Officers

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 also 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 that office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to serve in that office. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never be handled without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest survey 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 before its being held. The names of all nominees shall be separately discussed and voted on. During the discussion the nominee under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the church until the written ballot is taken. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and explained, 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 following a full and free discussion oriented to the relevant Scriptural passages. The vote will stand as it is first given in the written ballot.

c. Ordination

Following the election of an officer, there will be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer will 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 will signify their approval of an officer-elect. Should the elders be unable to conscientiously ordain an officer-elect (1 Tim. 5:22), they will inform each member of their reasons in an appropriate manner.

F. Review of Officers

1. Officers will hold office only as long as they meet the biblical qualifications for their office in the esteem of the church. The church, therefore, will reconfirm (or withdraw) its confidence in the biblical qualifications of each officer four years after his ordination and every fourth year thereafter.

2. There may arise reasons that would require an officer to be reviewed before the regularly scheduled time. 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-fourth of the total voting membership of the church. It must be presented to the elders, who will in a timely and constitutional way (see Paragraph 3 below) call such a meeting.

3. Any meeting for the review of an officer will be publicly advertised for at least three weeks prior to its being held. During the discussion, the officer under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the church until the written ballot is taken. 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 return to the meeting and defend himself. The church should seek unity of mind concerning the matter, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than 75% of those ballots cast shall be required for immediate confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing to receive a majority vote of confirmation no longer holds office. If any officer receives a confirmation vote greater than 50% but less than 75%, he has the option voluntarily to resign his office peaceably without dividing the church. If he does not resign his office voluntarily, then the church will follow the procedures defined in the next paragraph.

4. This paragraph defines the process mentioned in the previous paragraph. Hopefully the church will never have to initiate this process. This process has two primary goals: (1) to avoid an ugly church split; and (2) to prevent the majority of the church from losing the assets of the church. This process involves prayer, counsel, and re-evaluation of the officer in a timely way. First, since this situation has such great potential for grieving the Spirit and dividing the church, the church will engage in a season of fasting and prayer for divine guidance and deliverance. Second, since in the multitude of counselors there is safety, the church shall obtain counsel in accord with our London Confession of Faith, Chapter 26, Paragraph 15. Third, this process will conclude in a timely manner in one of two ways: either the officer will voluntarily step down from office peaceably, or, the church will have another confirmation vote within four months of the original vote. If in this second evaluation the officer receives a 75% majority vote of confirmation, he will retain his office. If he fails to receive a majority vote of confirmation, he no longer holds office. Either way, the matter will then be closed.

5. An officer may resign his office without any diminishing of his reputation if he does so in an orderly fashion and for good and valid reasons. This resignation, together with its reasons and the date on which he wishes his resignation to be effective, should be submitted in writing to the elders of the Church.

G. Full Support of Elders

1. Though all elders are equal as to the authority of their office, not all elders possess qualifications justifying 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). Therefore, 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 use 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:

- a. 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;
- b. A major portion of the church's financial stewardship is involved, for which its Head will hold it accountable; and
- c. 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 along 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 will be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. Such a recommendation may be considered in connection 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 will be given to the relevant teaching of Scripture (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). During the discussion the man under consideration and members of his immediate family will leave the presence of the church until the written ballot is taken. Such discussion must at all times reflect the fear of God, the claims of truth, and the gravity of the matter. Any vote on 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 connection 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 will follow the applicable procedures outlined in Paragraphs 2 and 3 above. Continuance of full support will require three-fourths of the ballots cast.

H. Loss of a Plurality of Elders

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 church, with prayer and due diligence, shall adopt temporary measures to alleviate as much as possible this deficiency until a plurality of elders is restored. When a plurality of resident elders is raised up, any temporary arrangement shall immediately cease.
2. To prevent abuse of authority and to preserve the autonomy of this church, whatever temporary measures the church adopts, in no case shall any persons who are not members of this church have authority as officers in this church as defined in this constitution in 8:C:3. Further, if a lone elder seeks pastoral care from the elders of another church, he shall not become a member of that church, and this church shall never abrogate its responsibility to recognize and retain its own officers.

ARTICLE 9 - OFFICIAL BOARD

In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," this church will have an official Board of Trustees. The official board will consist of the resident pastors (elders) as voting members and deacons as non-voting members. In the absence of a resident plurality of elders, both the eldership and the diaconate must approve any decision relevant to the Board of Trustees. The voting members of this board will serve as the legal representatives of the church.

ARTICLE 10 - CHURCH MEETINGS

A. The Annual Business Meeting

An annual business meeting of the church will be held in January or February of each year. At this annual meeting the advisory nominations ballot will be taken (see Article VIII, Section E, Paragraph 2, a). A report will be given by the elders which will 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 will also be presented. These reports in-

cluding the proposed budget will 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 will in turn make the proper announcement of the meeting. Every meeting at which business is to be transacted will 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 who have reached the age of eighteen (18) years will constitute the voting membership of the church. Those members currently suspended by a vote of the church (Article 6, B, 3) are not permitted to vote. 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 will 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 will constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The elders will 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.

ARTICLE 11 - CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

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 will be distributed in written form to the membership at least four (4) weeks prior to such a meeting.

ARTICLE 12 – DISSOLUTION

Should this church conclude its ministry and be dissolved, none of its assets remaining after meeting all responsibilities and payment of all just obligations shall inure to the benefit of any individual member of the church, its officers or other private individuals. Such assets, if any, shall in anticipation of its dissolution, be assigned by action of its members, at a duly called meeting (Article 10-B), to such other charitable organization (s) which are generally in harmony with its purpose and beliefs as stated in this Constitution and with the relevant civil law.

ARTICLE 13 - Appendix Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality

A. Theological Affirmations

1. We believe that God wonderfully and unchangeably creates each person as male or

female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Gen. 1:26-27). Rejection of one’s biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.
2. We believe that the term “marriage” has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (Gen. 2:18-25). We believe that God intends sexual relations to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2-5; Heb. 13:4). We believe that God has commanded that no sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Matt 15:18-20; 1 Cor 6:9-10).
3. We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Rom. 10:9-10; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). We also believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31).

B. Practical Restrictions

Because God has so ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man and a woman, before God, the church will only recognize marriages between a biological man and a biological woman. Further, the pastors, officers or spiritual representatives of the church shall only officiate in weddings and solemnize marriages between one man and one woman. Finally, the facilities and property of the church shall only host weddings between one man and one woman.

C. Divorce Exceptions

We affirm the Marriage statements as expressed in chapter 25 of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. To these excellent affirmations of marriage as a lifelong covenant, we adopt the following two exceptions drawn from the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 24, paragraphs 5 and 6.
1. In the case of adultery in marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to seek a divorce and after the divorce to remarry just as if the offending party were dead (Matt 5:31-32; 19:9; Rom 7:2-3).
2. Although the corruption of mankind is such that people are apt to seek arguments to justify unwarranted separation of those whom God has joined together in marriage, nothing but adultery or such willful desertion as cannot be remedied by the church or the civil authorities is sufficient cause to dissolve the bond of marriage (Matt 19:8-9; 1 Cor 7:15; Matt 19:6). In such cases a public and orderly procedure is to be observed, and the persons concerned are not to be left to their own wills and discretion in their own case (Deut 24:1-4).

D. Complementarian Implications

1. We affirm that the Scripture reveals a pattern of complementary order between men and women, and that this order is itself a testimony to the Gospel, even as it is the gift of our Creator and Redeemer. We also affirm that all Christians are called to service within the body of Christ, and that God has given to both men and women important and strategic roles within the home, the Church, and the society. We further affirm that the teaching office of the Church is assigned only to those men who are called of God in

fulfillment of the biblical teachings and that men are to lead in their homes as husbands and fathers who fear and love God (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; 1 Tim 2:11-15; Titus 2:3-5).

2. We deny that the distinction of roles between men and women revealed in the Bible is evidence of mere cultural conditioning or a manifestation of male oppression or prejudice against women. We also deny that this biblical distinction of roles excludes women from meaningful ministry in Christ's kingdom. Biblical clarity on these important gender issues is crucial for this church to faithfully preserve its witness to the Gospel (Rom 16:1; 1Cor 11:7-9; Gal 3:28; Eph 5:25; Col 3:18-21; 1 Tim 3:1-13; 1 Pet 3:1-7).

**Note concerning grammatical conventions: For readability, in numerous cases, the masculine pronouns he/his are used to refer to individuals in general.*