

Constitution
of
Covenant Baptist Church
of Clarksville, TN

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PREAMBLE

We, the members of Covenant Baptist Church do declare and establish this constitution for the preservation and security of the principles of our faith, and so that this body may be governed in a scriptural and orderly manner. This constitution will preserve the liberties and state the responsibilities of each individual member of this church including its officers. As members of Covenant Baptist Church, we voluntarily and solemnly submit ourselves to the following articles of this constitution.

ARTICLE I: NAME

This local body of Christ shall be known as Covenant Baptist Church of Clarksville, TN.

ARTICLE II: PURPOSE

This church exists by the grace of God and for the glory of God, which shall be the ultimate purpose of all its activities. We will seek to glorify the Triune God of Scripture¹ by enjoying and promoting His worship;² edifying and equipping the saints;³ engaging the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ both locally and worldwide;⁴ seeking whenever possible to both plant and strengthen other churches, promoting biblical faithfulness and purity in all the assemblies of Christ;⁵ and seeking to minister relief to the needy, especially among the

1 Ephesians 3:21

2 John 4:23,24; 1 Cor. 3:16,17; 1 Pet. 2:5

3 1 Cor. 12:27,28; 14:12,18,19,26; Eph. 4:11-16

4 Mat. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8; Acts 13 & 14

5 Acts 15:36,41; Acts 16:5; Jude 3

saints.⁶

ARTICLE III: CONFESSION OF FAITH

The Holy Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible word of God and is therefore the basis for any Statement of Faith. However, since most churches (even some heretical ones) subscribe to the above statement, we believe it is both prudent and useful to adhere to certain biblical statements and confessions in order that the doctrinal beliefs of this church may be clearly known. Covenant Baptist Church chooses for its statement of faith the *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*. We consider this document to be an excellent expression of the teaching of the Word of God. We find it to be a confirmation of faith, a means of edification and instruction, an aid in controversy, and a basis for church unity. Nevertheless, we acknowledge without hesitation or reservation that the Scriptures alone are God-inspired, and therefore must be the supreme authority in all matters of belief and practice.

ARTICLE IV: CHURCH COVENANT

SECTION 1: OUR NEW COVENANT CONFIDENCE

God has graciously entered into a New Covenant with His people⁷ through the work of Jesus Christ,⁸ whose obedience and blood infallibly secure all of its benefits for them.⁹ By making us members of the one body of Christ,¹⁰ the New Covenant lays upon us responsibilities, not only to God, but also to each other.

⁶ Rom. 15:26,27; Gal. 2:10; Gal. 6:10

⁷ Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Heb.8:7-13; 10:16,17; 13:20,21

⁸ Heb.8:6

⁹ Mat. 26:26-28; Heb. 13:20,21

¹⁰ Rom. 12:4,5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:25

In this covenant God writes His law upon our hearts and causes us to walk in His ways. Thus, both our desire and ability to obey God spring from the work of Jesus Christ. Christ purchased for us the Holy Spirit,¹¹ by whose gift of faith we obey, not to establish our own righteousness before God but to express our gratitude for grace. Covenant Baptist Church exists on the basis of the New Covenant and as a local expression of the power and grace of God in that covenant. In our church covenant we confess both our joyful faith in the God of the New Covenant and our willing embrace of its obligations. These New Covenant obligations require that we love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. By the grace of that covenant, we commit ourselves to the following obligations:

SECTION 2: OUR NEW COVENANT COMMITMENTS

I. Our Commitment to Our God

We will seek to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and mind, and to live before Him in such manner as will manifest this love in our worship, walk and witness.

A. We agree to *worship* God (1) exclusively (2) scripturally (3) sincerely and (4) regularly.

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, only through the mediation of His Son, and by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. We will worship God in His appointed way in the Scriptures, excluding from our worship anything that He has not commanded while conscientiously observing those duties and ordinances of the New Covenant.
3. We will worship God sincerely, avoiding drawing near to Him with lips only, but offering that true heart worship which He seeks from us.
4. We will worship God regularly, faithfully observing that public and corporate worship which He commands on the Lord's Day, while also

¹¹

John 14-16; Eph. 1:13-14

being diligent to attend all the stated services of the church, except when legitimately hindered.

- B. We agree to *walk* before God in Biblical holiness of heart and life. We recognize the seriousness of taking upon ourselves the name of the one true God in our baptism and church membership. We agree not to take that glorious name lightly, but rather to adorn our profession with honor by ever seeking a closer walk with God through the means of grace which He has appointed, including not only our faithful attendance at public worship, but also the maintaining of both private devotions (Bible study and prayer) and family worship. We will also pursue the salvation and sanctification of our children and other loved ones, by instructing them in God's truth, while also seeking to exemplify that truth in our godly walk before them.
- C. We further commit to honor God by our *witness* in this world, resisting the sins of this present evil age, while zealously endeavoring both by holy lives and faithful words to advance the Kingdom of Christ in this world by making known everywhere the one true God and the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

II. Our Commitment to Our Neighbors

We will seek to love our neighbors as ourselves, both the members of this church and those outside our membership.

A. We will love *one another in this church*:

1. We will care for each other in temporal things, rejoicing together in God's blessings, bearing one another's burdens and seeking whenever possible to actively relieve each other in our trials and sufferings.
2. We will care for each other spiritually, watching over one another's souls. We will each seek to help others on the way to heaven, not only by praying for each other, but also by scripturally encouraging and admonishing one another.
3. We will work diligently for the peace of this assembly by maintaining loving relationships with each other. We will seek to avoid sinning against each other in any way, and be quick to repent and seek forgiveness when we have done so. We will be slow to take offense, forbearing with one another, and always ready for reconciliation in

conflict, being mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay.

4. We covenant to diligently, sincerely and actively promote the well-being of this church, seeking to sustain its worship, ordinances, doctrine and discipline. We will cheerfully submit to the Christ-appointed leaders of the church, while contributing cheerfully and regularly to the support of its ministry. We will endeavor each one to do all within our power to make this church that which the Head of the church desires it to be.

B. We will love our *neighbors who are not part of this church*:

1. We will love all of our Christian neighbors, realizing that all true brothers in Christ are part of the same household of faith.¹² While seeking to faithfully hold to what we are convinced is taught in Holy Scripture, we will avoid all unholy sectarianism, seeking as far as possible to pursue and maintain the highest degree of friendship and fellowship, while also promoting the temporal and spiritual welfare of all of the family of God.
2. We will love our unsaved neighbors, seeking also their temporal well-being. But we will especially, according to Christ's great commission, seek to make disciples of the lost by clearly and faithfully sharing the saving gospel with them. We will also endeavor to walk before them in true holiness so that we may adorn the saving gospel we share with them. We engage moreover to promote the spread of the gospel of Christ worldwide, by our prayers, finances, and whatever other scriptural means are available to us.

III. Our Commitment to Persevere

We voluntarily and joyfully enter into this covenant, humbly acknowledging our remaining sin and shortcomings, but with prayerful dependence on the Omnipotent Spirit of God who is able to work in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight. We enter this covenant with a serious desire to please our God by keeping it to the best of our God-given ability. If the providence of God should

¹²

Gal. 6:10

move us from this church, we will endeavor to unite with some other faithful church where we can carry out the duties of this covenant.

ARTICLE V: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

SECTION 1: GENERAL STATEMENT

This is an autonomous, congregational, Elder-ruled Baptist church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The membership retains unto itself the right of exclusive self-government in all phases of the spiritual and temporal life of this church. The membership reserves the exclusive right to determine who shall be members of this church and the conditions of such membership.

SECTION 2: THE WARRANT FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A genuine Christian's commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ is inseparable from his commitment to His truth and His people. This commitment ordinarily requires a formal, open, voluntary, solemn and enduring commitment to membership in a local church. Following are some proofs of the existence of the local church which Christ ordained for His own glory and worship, and also for the spiritual benefit of His people, which shows the warrant for every true Christian to seek membership therein:

- A. The New Testament presents the local church as a distinct and defined group of individuals covenanted together to worship God and carry out the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ. The local church is made up of individuals who may be counted,¹³ added to,¹⁴ and even subtracted from.¹⁵
- B. Each local church of Christ is called upon to select leaders and

¹³ Acts 2:41,42; Acts 4:4

¹⁴ Acts 2:47; 5:14

¹⁵ Mat 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:12,13; 2 Cor. 2:6

representatives from among itself,¹⁶ thus making it a formal organization with recognized officers.¹⁷

- C. Fulfillment of the great commission requires church membership.¹⁸ In this commission there is an inseparable connection between making disciples, baptizing them, and then teaching them all things that Christ has commanded. It is clear from the Scriptures that the Apostles implemented this commission by gathering baptized disciples into local churches where they were taught all the things that Christ had commanded.¹⁹
- D. The whole of the New Testament presents a picture of disciples of Christ worshipping and serving Him in connection with some local church. We believe this is what Christ intends for His disciples to the end of the age.

SECTION 3: RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHURCH MEMBERS

Members of Covenant Baptist Church are expected (1) first and foremost, to have a good confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; (2) to have obeyed the Lord Jesus in the ordinance of believer's baptism; (3) to be faithful in all the duties essential to the Christian life; (4) to attend regularly the stated services of this church unless providentially hindered; (5) to submit cheerfully to the eldership of the church;²⁰ (6) to give cheerfully to its support and its causes as God has prospered them; (7) to participate in its organized work and make available to the church such talents and abilities with which God has endowed them.

¹⁶ Acts 6:1-6; Acts 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19,23

¹⁷ Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23

¹⁸ Mat 28:18-20

¹⁹ Acts 2:38-42; 1 Cor. 4:1-7; Titus 1:7

²⁰ Heb. 13:17

SECTION 4: PROCEDURE

Any person may apply to be a candidate for membership in Covenant Baptist Church. We understand the Scriptural priority of serving the Lord in one of His churches and therefore welcome any and all persons who are biblically qualified to join with us. However, we also recognize the vital importance of keeping the Lord's church sound in doctrine and holy in practice, and therefore we desire all potential members to understand and meet those biblical qualifications. Members are to be received only upon the recommendation of the elder(s) and by the consent of the church.

The method of receiving members into Covenant Baptist Church will be according to the following steps:

Step 1: An initial interview with a pastor in the church for the following reasons:

- A. To ascertain by the applicant's testimony, with as much certainty as possible, that the proposed member knows the way of salvation and has a personal saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is necessary because we believe that church membership is for true believers only.
- B. To make sure that the proposed member understands and is in general and substantial agreement with the doctrinal beliefs of our church. To gain this purpose, the prospective member will need to become generally familiar with the confession of this church. It is not expected that every new member (especially a recent convert) understand all the doctrines we believe, but there must be a general soundness in faith, and a humble willingness to learn God's truth, together with a determination not to sow any discord in the church with regard to any doctrinal matters in which the prospective member might be in disagreement with the church.
- C. To make sure that the proposed member understands what is expected of members of the church.

Step 2: When the pastoral interview process has been satisfactorily completed, then the membership candidate will be presented before the church for formal membership. This process will include the following:

- A. A formal announcement to the church of the desire of the candidate to become a member.
- B. The prospective member will give his testimony before the church, and a written copy of the member's testimony will be made available to the members of the church.
- C. Allowance of a period of not less than two weeks for the members to review the testimony, and voice any concerns to the pastor(s) concerning the church receiving the candidate into membership.

Step 3: After time has been allotted for the accomplishment of Step 2, the members will vote on the reception of the candidate into membership. A three-fourths (75%) vote of those members present and voting shall be required for acceptance into church membership.

Step 4: If the candidate is accepted by the church as a member, the candidate will be officially received into membership in a public worship service. If the candidate has not yet been baptized, baptism will be administered. During the public worship service, an elder will lead the candidate and the congregation in the following oath:

Questions to the Candidate:

1. Do you acknowledge yourselves to be sinners in the sight of God, justly deserving His wrath, and without hope except in His sovereign mercy?
2. Do you repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon Him alone for salvation as He is offered in the Gospel?
3. Will you endeavor, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to live according to your identity as a follower of Christ?
4. Do you engage to walk together with God's people in Christian love through the power of the Holy Spirit?
5. Will you support Covenant Baptist Church in its worship, work, and witness?
6. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of Covenant Baptist Church, and will you endeavor to maintain its purity and peace?

Question to the Congregation:

1. Do you as a congregation receive this (brother and/or sister) into our fellowship and engage to serve, encourage, watch over, and pray for them as fellow members of the body of Christ?

SECTION 5: TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

As is the case with receiving members, so the termination of church membership must be governed by biblical principles. Accordingly, membership in Covenant Baptist Church will be terminated in one of the following three ways:

- A. Death: Physical death obviously warrants the removal of membership from the church roll.
- B. Transfer of membership: Since the New Testament norm for all Christians is that they be members of true local churches, any person leaving the membership of this church should seek to transfer membership to another true church as soon as possible. We realize that this process may sometimes require a transitional period, and the elders will take such things into account when dealing with a member's transfer of membership. It will be the duty of the elders to handle transfer of membership in a way that accords with scriptural principles.
- C. Exclusion
 1. Exclusion, *not under discipline*: In some cases, a person's membership may need to be terminated for reasons, which, in the judgment of the church, may not warrant discipline. Such cases may include the resignation of a member who concludes that he is not a Christian; the resignation of a member who requests to be relieved from his church covenant obligations for reasons that the church or its elders may deem satisfactory; or the relocation of a member who no longer remains in contact with the church. The church shall exclude such persons from its membership roll, without the exercise of church discipline.
 2. Exclusion *by excommunication*: According to Holy Scripture, a church must exclude from its membership any person who persists in holding

or teaching serious doctrinal heresies, or who persists in conduct which is either publicly scandalous, or blatantly inconsistent with his or her Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity and peace of the church.²¹

ARTICLE VI: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

SECTION 1: FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE

Every disciple of Christ must be under Christ's discipline (His instruction and correction), which is administered to each one both directly through the Holy Spirit (self-discipline) and through the church.²² Each member is called to participate in the full-orbed life of the church in order that the body may build itself up in love.²³ There is to be mutual edification as each member exercises his gifts and graces, and seeks to promote the holiness of the rest.²⁴ This mutual concern for one another's sanctification will aid us in being kept from sin, in recovering from sin, and in growing in likeness to Jesus Christ. There are occasions, however, when failure in the application of this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

SECTION 2: CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE

Corrective discipline always has for its aims the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church, and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender. Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine, disorderly behavior, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In

²¹ Mat. 18:15ff.; 1 Cor. 5:1ff.; Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:10,11

²² 1 Cor. 12:12-27; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12,13; 10:24-25, Prov. 3:12

²³ Eph. 4:15-16

²⁴ Hebrews 3:12,13; 10:24

all such cases, reasonable efforts must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition.²⁵

In the case of *private sin and personal offenses*, the instructions in Matt. 18:15-20 give us a general framework for resolving the matter. That framework is expressed here in chronological steps, although the practical implementation of these steps may well call for flexibility and variation (as specific cases warrant).

Step 1: A member of Covenant Baptist Church who is in sin or thought to be in sin should be confronted privately by a fellow member (who is not necessarily an elder) and urged to repent. If he repents, then you have gained your brother and the process ends.

Step 2: If sin is present but the confronted member refuses to repent, then the original person who went to him should again go to him privately, this time with two or three other brothers to determine (1) if there is indeed sin present and (2) if the erring brother indeed is refusing to repent.

These initial two steps involve only a few members of the church and occur in private settings. If the confronted member persists in his refusal to repent, the matter progresses from informal private corrective discipline to formal public corrective discipline. This is discipline that is led by the elders, involves all of the voting members of the church, and occurs in a public setting. The following two steps characterize formal public corrective discipline.

Step 3: If the matter is not resolved in private, it should be brought to the elders who will investigate the issue. If the member is indeed in unrepentant sin, the elders will admonish the erring member to repent, and bring the matter before the church. Excommunication should ordinarily be a last resort of the church, and often should not be exercised until milder forms of biblical discipline have been meekly, lovingly and prayerfully utilized in a sincere effort to restore the offending member. Such restorative efforts may include public verbal reproof,²⁶ and temporary suspension of certain privileges of

²⁵ Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20

²⁶ Mat. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20

church membership, such as the right to vote or participate in the Lord's Supper.²⁷ The whole church should prayerfully admonish, confront, correct, and urge the erring member to repent.

Step 4: When other scriptural means of restoring an offender have failed, the church must be willing to excommunicate an offending member.²⁸ Persons may be excommunicated only by a majority vote of the church.²⁹

While excommunication should ordinarily be a last resort, in the *case of heinous, broadly reported, and known public sin*, discipline should not be delayed. Such sins (either moral or doctrinal) are so scandalous, gross and heinous in their nature, the church has a Scriptural right and mandate to immediately publicly censure and excommunicate those guilty of such sins if the honor of Christ and His church necessitate this.

All acts of church discipline, including excommunication, must be lovingly carried out for the glory of Christ and the welfare and purity of the church³⁰ with the goal of eventually restoring the offender to good standing in the church.³¹

SECTION 3: RESTORATION TO MEMBERSHIP

Since full restoration is the goal of all church discipline, all members of the church should unite in its exercise when necessary, praying earnestly for God's gracious, restorative blessing upon those who have been disciplined. It is also both the duty and privilege of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a disciplined or excommunicated member upon satisfactory

²⁷ Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6,14

²⁸ Mat. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13

²⁹ 2 Cor. 2:6; See Article VII, Section 3.C.5 and Article VII, Section 3.G for statements concerning elders.
See Article VII, Section 4.D for a statement concerning deacons.

³⁰ 1 Cor. 5:6

³¹ 2 Cor. 2:7

evidence of repentance.³² Thus any person whose membership has been terminated for any offense may be restored by a majority vote of this church upon evidence of his repentance and reformation.

ARTICLE VII: CHURCH OFFICERS

SECTION 1: GENERAL STATEMENT

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church.³³ He has ordained that individual churches 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. These officers govern with due respect to the rights and liberties of the whole church set forth in the Scriptures.³⁴ Christ has ordained that local churches be ruled by elders and served by deacons. Beside the offices of elder and deacon, the Scriptures acknowledge no other offices that continue in the church today.³⁵

SECTION 2: GENERAL PREREQUISITES

- A. All officers of this church must be members of this church.
- B. Any individual set apart to one of these offices must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's confession of faith and constitution. If he should at any time move from this agreement, he is under immediate, spiritual and moral obligation to make that fact known to the elders privately.
- C. While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given to women and the wonderful assistance they may render to the officers of the church,³⁶ the Bible prohibits them from holding either the office of deacon

32 2 Cor.2: 6-8

33 Col. 1:18

34 Matt. 18:15-20; I Cor. 5:1-13; Acts 6:1-7; 2 Cor. 2:6

35 Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13

36 Rom. 16:1-6; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11

or elder. Women, therefore, shall not be nominated, elected, or ordained to either of these offices in the church, nor exercise authority over or teach a man in the church.³⁷

SECTION 3: ELDERS

- A. Those who have been called and equipped by God to rule and teach in the church are identified as elders, pastors, or overseers. These three names designate one and the same office in a New Testament Church.³⁸
- B. Anyone desiring the office of an elder must evidence to God's people the personal, domestic and ministerial qualifications set forth in the Scriptures, such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.³⁹
- C. 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:
 - 1. It is divinely-delegated authority. Thus, elders are answerable to God for the exercise of this authority.⁴⁰ They are, therefore, obligated to discharge all the duties specified in the Scriptures in such passages as Acts 20:17-35, 1 Peter 5:1-4 and Hebrews 13:17.
 - 2. When elders exercise this authority by requiring obedience to their leadership, they must seek to gain the consciences of God's people through the ministry of the Word.⁴¹
 - 3. The authority of the elders does not include the right to make all decisions unilaterally. The Bible makes clear that decisions having to do with corrective discipline and the recognition of officers require the

37 1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7

38 Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11-12; Titus 1:5, 7

39 1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9

40 Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17

41 Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17

consent of the local church.⁴² It is only fitting that other important matters such as the reception and exclusion of church members, the full support and involuntary removal of officers and major financial decisions be approved by the consent of the church. Nevertheless, the elders must provide definitive leadership to the church in the making of such decisions.

4. The authority of the elders is limited to the sphere of the local church. They may not require consequences for sin beyond those of church discipline, invade the spheres of other ordained human authorities (husbands, fathers, civil rulers and employers), or command God's people regarding matters not specified in Scripture.⁴³ They must, however, order the house of God by the application of His Word.⁴⁴
5. 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 other members of the church.⁴⁵ Thus, each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and accountable to the church as a whole.⁴⁶
6. The authority of every elder (overseer 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

42 Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6

43 Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14

44 Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3a; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-6:9; I Cor. 7:25-28; 35-40

45 See Article V, Section 3 on member responsibilities and Article VI on church discipline.

46 Matt. 18:17; 23:9; 26:31; Gal. 2:11; 3 John 1,9-10

never undermine real parity among the elders.⁴⁷

7. Finally, the authority of the elders is a very real authority. When it is Biblically exercised, God's people are required to submit to this authority.⁴⁸

- D. One crucial aspect of the duties of elders is overseeing the flock of God. Fulfillment of this duty shall include, when possible, regular pastoral visits with each member of the church.
- E. Another crucial aspect of the duties of elders is exercising leadership with regard to the meetings and worship of the church. The elders shall appoint such meetings as they believe good for the spiritual health of the church and assure that they are conducted to the glory of God and according to the provisions of His Word.
- F. While the New Testament clearly indicates that there may be elders who are not financially supported by the church, the elders who rule well, and especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine, will, when possible, 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.⁴⁹
- G. Though a plurality of elders is the New Testament norm for every church, and while this church will endeavor to have such a plurality, 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. If, however, an elder fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications, he may be removed from his office by the church following the directions of 1 Timothy 5:19-20.
- H. If the church through the providence of God comes to have no elders, then

47 Acts 20:28; Gal. 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17

48 Heb. 13:17

49 1 Tim. 5:17ff.

the deacons shall assume leadership as the church waits upon the Lord to provide elders. If the church also has no deacons, then the church shall choose two men of good reputation to act as leaders while the church waits upon the Lord to provide biblically qualified elders and/or deacons. These leaders shall seek the counsel and guidance of a church of like faith and practice that has an established eldership. These leaders shall also guide the church in selecting a pulpit committee⁵⁰ to search for a qualified man to pastor the church.

SECTION 4: DEACONS

- A. Deacons are primarily responsible for administering the ministries of mercy and benevolence in the church, along with other practical matters in the church. Such other practical matters may include the management of various business affairs, the facilitation of particular ministries within the church, and the maintenance and improvement of the church's facilities or property. In this way the deacons assist the elders in those practical aspects of ministry, which would otherwise distract them from their priorities of prayer, the ministry of the Word, and shepherding.
- B. Deacons must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders.
- C. 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.⁵¹
- D. No term of office shall be fixed for deacons. If a deacon fails to meet the necessary Scriptural qualifications for his office, he may be removed from office by the church.

SECTION 5: APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS

- A. *General Statement:* The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, He has ordained that

50 See Article VII, Section 5.B.1.

51 Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13

they be formally recognized by the consent of the particular church they serve. Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership.⁵² This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible.⁵³ 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 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 proceed without much prayerful waiting upon God, careful consideration of the relevant passages of Scripture and thorough evaluation of those persons being considered. Each member of the church has a responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

B. *Procedure of Appointment:* The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church is carried out in 3 steps: nomination, election and ordination.

1. Nomination

The members of the church are encouraged to express to the elders (privately) their views concerning those whom Christ may be gifting for office in the church. The elders will seriously consider the wisdom God gives to His church. However, since it is the elders' responsibility to lead the church, nominations to office are to be made by the eldership.

If at any time the church is without a pastor, a pulpit committee shall be elected by the church at any regular or specially called congregational meeting. The committee shall seek out a scripturally qualified man, and then nominate him to the church. The church shall then prayerfully consider him for the office of overseer. When possible, the church should look within its own membership to see if Christ is

52 1 Tim. 4:14

53 1 Tim. 5:22

actually equipping someone for the office from within the church.

2. Election

At a properly called meeting of the church, 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 unanimity concerning each nominee, but where unanimity is not realized, three-fourths (75%) of those ballots cast shall be required for election.

3. Ordination

Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a worship service set aside at which time the officer-elect shall be ordained and installed into office by the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Before the laying on of the hands, the pastor will lead the officer-elect in the following oath:

Questions for Elders:

- 1) Do you believe the Scriptures as written in the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and do you accept them as the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- 2) Have you personally adopted and will you cheerfully submit to and defend the Confession and Constitution of this church?
- 3) Do you accept the office of Elder readily, and do you promise to perform its duties of caring for the flock of God in the fear of His Name?

Question for Deacons:

- 1) Do you believe the Scriptures as written in the Old and New Testament to be the Word of God, and do you accept them as the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- 2) Have you personally adopted and will you cheerfully submit to and defend the Confession and Constitution of this church?
- 3) Do you accept the office of Deacon, and do you promise to care for

the poor and needy and to manage the practical affairs of this church in the fear of God?

This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the church.⁵⁴ The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer-elect.

SECTION 6: GIFTED BROTHERS

The church shall have the authority to formally “approve and call” men not presently recognized as elders, yet who show a giftedness to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ in accordance with the London Confession: Chapter 26, Paragraph 11. This shall take the official form of a “License to Preach” and shall serve as a commendation to both this church and other congregations. After a significant trial period in which a brother exercises his gift to preach before the congregation, the conferral of this “License to Preach” shall be recommended by the elders and a three-fourths (75%) vote of the members present and voting at a properly called congregational meeting.

ARTICLE VIII: CHURCH PROPERTY

SECTION 1: GENERAL STATEMENT

All property of this church is to be held for the use and benefit of those who are members thereof. This property is set apart to be used for the worship of God, the edification of His people, and any other use which is deemed necessary for the propagation of the gospel of Christ by this church and its leadership. Should any disagreements arise regarding the use of said property, such disputes shall be settled by majority vote of the members of this church. We believe that each and every local church of Christ is autonomous under the headship of Jesus Christ, and shall choose for itself what shall be done with its own property. We agree together to seek Divine wisdom in the usage of this property for the glory of God, the good of His church, and the promotion of His truth, according to the Holy Scriptures.

SECTION 2: TRUSTEES

The elders will select two men from the officers of the church to serve as the

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Acts 13:1-3

trustees of this church and to represent the church in all legal transactions. If there is only one officer, the second trustee will be selected from among the men who are voting members of the church. If there are no church officers, the congregation will select two men from among the voting members to serve as trustees.

ARTICLE IX: CHURCH FINANCES

SECTION 1: GENERAL STATEMENT

The work of this church is financially dependent upon the voluntary gifts of God's people. Before the December congregational meeting, the elders and deacons will obtain an estimate of the needs of the several divisions of the work and a prepared budget, detailing the proposed expenditures for the coming year. Upon the approval by a majority vote of the congregation, the budget shall be considered the basis for the current liabilities. No one is authorized to make changes in the budget or to make unauthorized disbursements without the consent of the church. The fiscal year of the church shall begin January first and end December thirty-first.

SECTION 2: TREASURER

The elders shall appoint a treasurer from among the members of the church. The responsibility of the treasurer will be to keep the financial books accurate and up to date, as well as provide financial reports to the church and its elders. The elders may also appoint an assistant treasurer to help in these duties. The elders shall have the authority to replace the treasurer and/or assistant treasurer whenever it seems wise.

ARTICLE X: ASSOCIATIONS

The government of this church is vested in the body of believers who compose it. It is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body, but recognizes and sustains the obligations of mutual counsel and cooperation which are common among Baptist churches, and will seek, insofar as is practical and scriptural to maintain cooperation with other churches of Jesus Christ. When it is thought desirable and upon the recommendation of the elders, this church may join itself to an association(s) of churches. Such affiliations may be entered with

the expressed consent and approval of the congregation by a majority vote.⁵⁵ Withdrawal from associations may be effected by the same procedure.

The purposes in joining an association of churches are: mutual edification, cooperative efforts in spreading the gospel, accountability, providing an avenue whereby grievances may be addressed, and reciprocal counsel. No association shall have any authority or power over this church.

Delegates to such associations shall be chosen by the elders of the church, with the elders taking the general oversight of all delegates and business matters.

ARTICLE XI: CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

SECTION 1: BIENNIAL MEETINGS

Biennial meetings to give pastoral and financial reports to the congregation, and otherwise conduct the business of the church will occur in the months of July and December. Quarterly financial statements will be available in April, July, October, and December. The proposed budget for the next fiscal year will be voted on in the December meeting.

SECTION 2: OTHER OCCASIONAL MEETINGS

Additional congregational meetings may be called by the pastors as necessary. They may also be called by one-fourth of the voting members, providing they make a written request for such a meeting. In the latter case, this request must state the reason for the meeting, be signed by one-fourth of the members in good standing and be presented to the pastors, who shall in turn make the proper announcement of the meeting. These occasional meetings shall be announced at regular services for at least two successive Lord's Days prior to the meeting. In cases that require urgent and/or immediate action, the pastors may, when necessary, call for a meeting for informational purposes, for an issue requiring immediate public censure or excommunication,⁵⁶ or for a vote of the church on financial matters that are urgent or time sensitive.

55 Acts 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19

56 See Article VI, Section 2, the paragraph after Step 4.

SECTION 3: VOTING

Any member of the church eighteen years of age or over,⁵⁷ in good and regular standing, shall have the privilege and responsibility to vote on any question properly brought before the congregation. All voting members should regard their presence at a duly called church meeting with the same seriousness and responsible churchmanship with which they would regard their attendance at any other meeting of the church. It shall be our goal to discern prayerfully the mind of God so that it may be said of us, as it was said of the church in Acts 6, that this "pleased the whole multitude." In situations where unanimity is not realized, except where the constitution requires a different proportionate vote, a simple majority of those voting will make a motion valid. The voting members present at any properly convened meeting of the church shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

SECTION 4: CLERK

The elders shall appoint a clerk from among the members of the church. The responsibility of the clerk will be to record all the business transacted by the church, collect all documents submitted to the church at its meetings, and provide for the church and its elders a careful record of the church's business. This record shall be available to the church and its elders. The elders shall have the authority to replace the clerk whenever it seems wise.

ARTICLE XII: CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

SECTION 1: NATURE

This constitution, like all merely human documents, may be fallible. It simply reflects an earnest and sincere attempt to apply the Scriptures in ordering the life of this local church. Furthermore, we as members of this church have solemnly committed ourselves to follow this constitution in ordering the life of this church.

⁵⁷ Eighteen years of age is chosen in accordance with "the light of nature and Christian prudence."
(See the Second London Confession, Chapter 1, Paragraph 6).

SECTION 2: DEFICIENCIES

If at any time an elder or member of the church believes that adherence to this constitution would require a violation of the Word of God, he should make this known to the elders. If the elders conclude that Biblical principle requires an amendment of the constitution, they must communicate this matter in a timely way, submit relevant amendments to the church and seek by church vote to amend the constitution.

SECTION 3: AMENDMENTS

Amendments to this constitution must be adopted by three-fourths (75%) of the voting members at any regular church meeting or a special meeting called for this purpose. Such proposed amendments shall be distributed in written form to the membership at least two weeks prior to such a meeting.