

Constitution of the Reformed Baptist Church of Nashville

(Revised August 2005)

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
PREAMBLE.....	3
ARTICLE I - NAME	3
ARTICLE II - PURPOSE	3
ARTICLE III – COVENANT	3
A. Introductory Statement.....	3
B. Summary of Our Covenant Responsibilities	3
ARTICLE IV - ARTICLES OF FAITH	4
ARTICLE V – MEMBERSHIP	4
A. Warrant for Membership.....	4
B. Requirements for Membership.....	5
C. Types of Membership.....	6
D. Reception into Membership	6
E. Termination of Membership	7
G. Commitment of Members.....	8
H. Records of Membership.....	10
ARTICLE VI - CHURCH DISCIPLINE.....	10
A. Formative Discipline	10
B. Corrective Discipline.....	10
C. Restoration	12
ARTICLE VII – ORDINANCES.....	12
A. General Statement	12
B. Baptism	12
C. The Lord’s Supper.....	13
ARTICLE VIII - OFFICE BEARERS.....	13
A. General Statement	13
B. Elders	13
C. Deacons	15
D. Appointment of Office Bearers	15
E. Review of Office Bearers.....	16
F. Full Support of Elders.....	16
ARTICLE IX - OFFICIAL BOARD	16
ARTICLE X - CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS	16
A. Calling of Meetings.....	16
B. Special Meetings	16
C. Voting	17

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Reformed Baptist Church of Nashville, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves. Our hope is that men might rejoice to see our good order and the steadfastness of our faith in Christ (Colossians 2:5)

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this church shall be the Reformed Baptist Church of Nashville [Tennessee]. This name is not intended to be divisive, but only to be an expressive label to help identify certain distinctive beliefs. Preeminently, we desire to be a church of Jesus Christ.

ARTICLE II - PURPOSE

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

ARTICLE III – COVENANT

A. Introductory Statement

God has graciously entered into a covenant relationship with His believing people (Jeremiah 31:31-34;32:40; Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:16, 17; 13:20, 21). Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6). His blood is the blood of the New Covenant, which infallibly secures all the benefits of the covenant for all of God's people (Matthew 26:26-28; Hebrews 13:20, 21). God has in this New Covenant made us members one of another (Romans 12:4, 5; 1Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 4:25).

Therefore, we have covenant responsibilities to each other, as well as to God. God has promised in this covenant to write His laws in our hearts and to cause us to walk in His ways (that is, to enable us to keep our covenant responsibilities). The motivation and ability to obey God's laws spring from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who, by His death satisfied the holy wrath of God that was against us due to our sins. It is by the enablement of the Holy Spirit that we obey, in loving gratitude for Christ's righteousness, which has been imputed to us, and not to establish our own righteousness before God. We obey with the confidence that the end of Christ's death will be realized in us (that is, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" (Romans 8:4) and that we should be a people "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14)).

The following paragraphs are a summary of what we believe are our covenant responsibilities toward God and toward one another. This summary forms the basis for our giving and receiving instruction for ourselves and for our families.

B. Summary of Our Covenant Responsibilities:

Having been brought by Divine Grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to give up ourselves to Him, and having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other as a body of Jesus Christ.

With prayerful dependence on our God:

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We will walk together in brotherly love, ministering to the physical and spiritual needs of one another by exercising an affectionate care and watchfulness, faithfully admonishing one another as occasion may require.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together in public worship, nor neglect to pray for one another.

We will endeavor to bring up those under our care in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness, and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.

We will seek, having denied ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly according to the rule of Scripture, remembering our special obligation due to our commitment to the Lord expressed in our baptism.

We will engage in the work of the ministry by the exercise of our spiritual gifts in the body.

We will work together for the continuance of a faithful evangelical ministry in this church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines.

We will financially contribute cheerfully and regularly for the support of our ministers of the Gospel, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

We will, if we should move from this local congregation, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

We will, if we feel sinned against by another, seek quick reconciliation and restoration by gracious confrontation and admonishment.

We will, if we sin against another, seek quick reconciliation by confession of our transgressions.

Knowing that all obedience is imperfect obedience in this life, we will deal with one another in grace, forgiving one another, and seeking to restore anyone overtaken in a trespass with a spirit of gentleness.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

ARTICLE IV - ARTICLES OF FAITH

- A. The Bible is held by this church as the final authority in all matters of faith and life over against the laws, traditions, and confessions of men.
- B. We accept the London Confession of Faith of 1689 as our written expression of what the Bible teaches for the church, and especially her leadership.

Though our confession is seen as a good expression of the Truths of the Word of God, it is a man-made document and not God-inspired. For this reason disagreeing with the confession at certain minor points is acceptable and to be almost expected. Two matters of disagreement are here expressed:

- 1.) In Chapter 10 - Paragraph 3 a statement is made concerning "elect infants" and those "who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the Word." It is suggested that this positive statement goes beyond the Scriptural Revelation. While the possibility is not denied, it is also not revealed. Therefore the church's official position is that God, being the all just, holy, righteous, and loving Being will do what is right (Genesis 18:25).
- 2.) In Chapter 26 - Paragraph 4 a statement is made concerning the Pope of Rome and how he is "that antichrist, that man of sin, and son of perdition." While it is not denied that the office of the Papacy of Rome is anti-Christ, and that to exalt oneself to the judge of the earth and Vicar of Christ in the earth is a heinous sin, yet it is suggested that to say that any present Pope is the antichrist or the man of sin goes beyond the Revelation of Scripture.

ARTICLE V – MEMBERSHIP

A. Warrant for Membership

The New Testament calls all Christians to a formal, open, solemn, voluntary and enduring commitment to Jesus Christ, to His truth and to His people. A true Christian's commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ must include, and is inseparable from his commitment to Christ's truth and to Christ's people. Such a commitment

to Christ, His truth and His people ordinarily requires a formal, open, solemn, voluntary and enduring commitment of church membership in a local church for the following biblical reasons:

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

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

B. Requirements for Membership

1. Conversion - To be eligible for membership, a person must demonstrate repentance toward God and the fruits thereof (Acts 26:20), as well as that faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) which produces godly works (Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:18, 22). A person then should be or have been baptized as an expression of that repentant faith.
2. Beliefs – A member must be able to profess essential agreement with the purpose (as stated in Article II), covenant (as stated in Article III), and confession (as stated in Article IV) of the church. There may be some who desire to join who have some non-essential disagreement. These cases will be determined by the elders (see section V.C.2. "Associate Membership").

Mastery of the church's confession is not required of any new disciple before he is admitted to church membership. Such a requirement would violate the order of Matthew 28:19, 20, which instructs us to disciple, to baptize, and then to teach the baptized disciple to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. It is necessary, however, that any disciple applying for membership manifest a willingness to be taught and agreement with what he already knows concerning the church's doctrine and government.

The church member should, however, be able to affirm these "Summary of the Truths We Believe and Teach" as essential to the Christian Faith.

1. The inspiration, inerrancy, and authority of the Bible;
2. The absolute sovereignty of the Triune God over all of history and salvation;
3. The essential deity of Jesus Christ, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His substitutionary death, and His physical resurrection;

4. The present session of Jesus Christ in heaven and His future return to judge the world and establish His everlasting kingdom;
 5. That salvation is by the grace of God alone, on the basis of the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and wholly apart from human merit;
 6. That the only valid answer to the many evils in present-day human society is to be found in the gospel of Christ. which is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone who truly believes it"; That God commands all people to repent and to believe the gospel;
 7. That the church is composed solely of repentant and believing sinners who confess Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and submit to His rule and authority as set forth in the Scriptures;
 8. That Christians have the solemn obligation to conduct themselves at all times in a manner worthy of the gospel they profess to believe;
 9. That Christians are responsible for the evangelistic spreading of the gospel to the ends of the earth.
3. Submission - Church members should be in willing submission, within biblical bounds (see Article VIII.3.B.d for limitations), to the ordained rule of the church (Hebrews 13:17), and particularly as expressed in this constitution.

If one who is already a member of the church at any time concludes that he no longer satisfies the requirements for membership, he is under obligation to inform the elders of that fact.

C. Types of Membership

1. Regular Members

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

2. Associate Members

The membership status of any whose relationship to the church involves unusual circumstances (which may include those with medical difficulties, temporary students, short-term job transfers, or those with some particular points of doctrinal disagreement) shall be determined in each case by the elders, subject to the approval of the congregation.

D. Reception into Membership

1. Observation - Because this church's view of membership is such a contrast to modern church practice we encourage those interested in church membership to spend a time of "courtship" with the church for the purpose of getting to know the beliefs and practices better. There is not a set or determined time for such observation and will vary according to miscellaneous circumstances.

In balance to this, it is acknowledged that, because membership in a local church is biblical, refusal or delaying church membership can, in certain cases, be sinful and a display of disobedience to God. Therefore an earnest desire for a member to apply for membership, as well as an eager readiness by the church to receive members is emphasized.

2. Written petition - Any person desiring to become a member of the church is to fill out a "Petition for Membership."
3. Pastoral interview - Upon the reception of a petition for membership, the elders will meet with the applicant. If the applicant is, or has been, a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine his standing in that church and his reasons for leaving. At the discretion of the elders, a letter of inquiry concerning the person's standing may be sent to that church before his acceptance as

a member in this church is determined. This is our attempt to respect the order of one's previous church.

4. Congregational consideration - Upon elder approval, the name of the applicant shall be announced for at least three consecutive Lord's Days at stated meetings of the church. This time period is for the purpose of enabling the members to read his understanding of the Gospel and personal testimony (which is extracted from the petition for membership) and raise any questions or objections concerning the applicant's qualifications. Members are expected to consider this a personal duty of the most serious character. Members are to voice any unresolved concerns to the elders.
5. Congregational reception – Barring any unresolved issues, or particular disqualification, the person will be publicly received at a stated meeting of the church (Matthew 3:6-12; Acts 9:26, 27; 1John 4:1; Revelation 2:2). This is to include a congregation reading of the church covenant (summary of our Covenant responsibilities).

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 shall be transferred to the file of former members.

b. By Transfer

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

c. By Dismissal

1.) Occasionally, a member whose conduct does not warrant corrective discipline and who is in good standing in the church may request termination of his membership. This request must be made in writing to the elders. Termination may be requested for the following reasons:

- a.) A member in good standing may conclude that he is not truly saved.
- b.) A member in good standing may wish to terminate his membership for reasons that do not impugn his Christian profession (i.e. non-heretical doctrinal shift).
- c.) A member ceases to maintain vital contact with this church due to relocation or other unique circumstances.

2.) Due to the seriousness of church membership, some circumstances may warrant some form of admonition from the church or leadership. If, because of relocation or other unique circumstances, a member ceases to maintain vital contact with this church, he may be excluded at the discretion of the elders. Elders shall simply communicate to the congregation that such a person is no longer a member. If one who has been dismissed again applies for membership, the normal procedures shall be followed as set forth in Section C of this Article.

3.) Dismissal is not to be considered as church discipline, but is recognized as being less than ideal.

d. By Excommunication

According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a congregation 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 (Matthew 18:15ff; 1Corinthians 5:1ff; Romans 16:17; Titus 3:10, 11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Article VI, Section B, of this Constitution.

2. Implications of Termination

- a. The Reformed Baptist Church of Nashville does not exist in isolation form, but is part of the universal church of Christ, composed of all true churches. Accordingly, open and forthright communication among the churches is vital for the purity, peace, edification and unity of the church universal. Therefore the elders may, at their discretion, disclose to the members of this church and to other churches the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Acts 15:24; 1Timothy 1:20; 2Timothy 2:17; 4:10; 1John 2:18, 19).
- b. In addition, the Reformed Baptist Church of Nashville 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 (2Corinthians 9:20, 21). Therefore, the elder may, at their discretion, disclose to other persons outside the ecclesiastical circles mentioned above the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Leviticus 5:1; Proverbs 29:24; 1 Peter 4:15).
- c. Termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, spread false teachings or reports, or engage in any other behavior which threatens the peace and unity of this church or the church universal. Accordingly, when it is established that a former member is behaving divisively, the elders may issue whatever warnings they deem appropriate to maintain and preserve the peace and harmony of this church and the church universal (Acts 15:24; Romans 16:17-20; 1Timothy 1:20; 2Timothy 2:17; 4:10; 1John 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; 1Corinthians 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); 1Corinthians 5:4-7; 13 (cp. 1Corinthians 1:2));
3. Laboring to extend God's Kingdom in ministries of the church (as one's gifts, graces and calling make appropriate) (1Corinthians 12:4-27 (cp. 1 Corinthians 1:2); Ephesians 4:7; 11-12; 16; 1Peter 4:10-11);
4. Reception of the committed oversight and care of the pastors of the church (Acts 20:28; 1Peter 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); 1Corinthians 5:4-5 (cp. 1Corinthians 1:2); Galatians 6:10).

G. Commitment of Members

While perfection or sinlessness will not be achieved in this life, a real and earnest striving after peace and holiness is the responsibility of every true Christian (Hebrews 12:14). Perfection in the following areas is not required to become a member, but every member must be committed to see an increase in likeness to Christ, by the Grace of His Spirit, to accomplish these biblical expectations.

1. Personal life

Communion with God - All the members of the church commit themselves to make use of the various means of grace that are available to them, such as the regular reading of the Bible and prayer, for the purpose of growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).

Obedience – Members of the church commit themselves to strive for universal and joyful obedience to the precepts of God's Word in daily life. (Titus 2:12).

Witness - Church members commit themselves to be salt and light in this world and labor to bear witness to his faith in Christ, both by consistent Christian conduct and by the testimony of his lips.

2. Family life

All the members of this church commit themselves to obey the teachings of Scripture in respect to family life and government which include:

Husbands - The husband is the God-appointed head of the family and must rule his household with gentleness, love, and wisdom. Husbands are to honor and cherish their wives with Christ-likeness (Ephesians 5:25ff; 1Timothy 3:4; 1Peter 3:7). They also are normally to provide for their households things both spiritual and physical (1Timothy 5:8). They commit to instruct by the regular reading of Scripture and family prayer for the spiritual nourishment of their wives and/or children (Deuteronomy 6:7; Joshua 24:15; Ephesians 5:29; 6:4).

Wives - The wife must love (Titus 2:4) and be in Scriptural submission to her husband in all things as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22-24; 1Peter 3:1-6), with a desire to do good and not evil to him all the days of her life (Proverbs 31:12).

Parents – Parents, and particularly fathers, commit themselves to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians. 6:1-4).

Children – All members (who have living parents, and are therefore children) commit to honor and obey parents according to their age and circumstances (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20; 1Timothy 5:3-8).

3. Church life

Attendance - Members commit themselves to attend the stated meetings of the church unless providentially hindered by illness, unusual working conditions, and other such circumstances (Hebrews 10:24, 25). The stated meetings of the church are as follows:

- a. All congregational services on the Lord's Day;
- b. Congregational business meetings; and
- c. Any special meetings that the elders shall occasionally deem necessary.

Members are encouraged, based on principles of commitment, love, and courtesy, to inform an elder if there is necessary reason to be absent from the above stated meetings.

While other studies, prayer meetings, or fellowship times are not required, all members are encouraged to participate in the life of the church through these as circumstances allow.

Financial support - The Scriptures teach that Christians should financially support the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate giving made through the local church (Matthew 3:8-10; 1Corinthians 16:1, 2; 2Corinthians 8:9). The tithe (ten percent of one's gross income) is not imposed on the people of God as a tax but is strongly urged upon each member as an expression of worship and the Biblical norm for basic giving. Added to this should be gifts and offerings according to one's ability and the willingness of his heart (2Corinthians 8:1-5; Exodus 36:2-7).

Relationship to leadership - All who come into the membership of this church commit themselves to recognize and to submit to the authority of the overseers of the church within biblically defined bounds (1Corinthians 16:15, 16; 1Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Hebrews. 13:17).

Relationship to other members - We who have been joined to Christ by faith and are members of this church are also members one of another (Romans 12:5). With this privileged relationship come particular responsibilities. We must maintain mutual transparency and honesty (Ephesians 4:25). We must rejoice in each other's honor and bear one another's sorrows (1Corinthians 12:26). We must discreetly confess our faults one to another (James 5:16). We must mutually oversee each other, faithfully admonish and encourage one another, and avoid all backbiting and gossip (Matthew 18:15ff; 1Thessalonians 5:14, 15; Hebrews 3:12, 13; 10:24, 25). We must seek to exercise hospitality as God

gives opportunity and, when necessary, help meet the material needs of our brethren (Galatians 6:10); James 2:14-16; 1John 3:16-18).

Christian Liberty - If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in His Word, a Christian is at liberty in their personal life 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 (1Peter 1:17; 1 Corinthians 10:31), a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren (1Corinthians 8:9; Romans 15:1-3), a compassion for the lost (1Corinthians 9:19-22), and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul (Romans 13:14; 1Corinthians. 6:12; 9:24-27; Galatians 5:22, 23; 1Peter 2:16).

4. Citizenship

Members commit themselves to pray for (1Tim2:1-2), honor (1Pet2:17), and be subject to the governing authorities (Rom13:1; 1Pet2:13).

H. Records of Membership

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

ARTICLE VI - CHURCH DISCIPLINE

A. Formative Discipline

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

B. Corrective Discipline

1. General Statement

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

- c. The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (1Corinthians 5:6) and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender (1Corinthians 5:5; 2Corinthians 2:5-8; 1Timothy 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 (Galatians 2:11-14; 1Timothy 5:20), patterns of sin (Titus 1:12, 13), or serious doctrinal error (Titus 1:10-13) pose a significant threat to the godliness, unity or testimony of the congregation. Those who humbly receive the word of public reproof, own and confess their sin, and manifest a transformed life (Proverbs 28:13) shall afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance (2Corinthians 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 (Romans 16:17-20; 2Thessalonians 3:6-15). In all cases of suspension the offending person is still to be regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church. Therefore, in accordance with the procedures outlined below for each of the five major categories of offenses, the elders shall at a business meeting of the church recommend that the offending member be suspended, specifying its grounds. To be valid, an act of suspension must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, the elders shall have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension upon a member which will bar him from not more than one Lord's Table while they deliberate the most prudent course of action. The major categories of sin which require suspension are as follows:

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

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

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

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

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

When a member deliberately persists in conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for obedience to the Word of God or for the order established by Christ for His church in Scripture (1Corinthians 11:17-34; 14:37-40; 1Timothy 3:14, 15) and adapted to our church in this Constitution, he may be suspended as a disorderly man (2Thessalonians 3:6). Whenever the

elders become aware that, in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline (1Thessalonians 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (2Thessalonians 3:14, 15). If, even after receiving such admonition from the elders, a member persists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the disorderly brother be suspended (2Thessalonians 3:14, 15). If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph B, 4, b of this Article.

d. A Scandalous Sin

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

e. Contempt of Church Discipline

If a person is accused or suspected of a sin requiring corrective discipline, yet absents himself from the meetings of the church, or refuses to meet with the elders so that the matter may be investigated, such a person may be suspended (Matthew 18:17; Numbers 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. Some kinds of conduct and doctrine are not merely disorderly, but are actually traitorous to the cause of Christ (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17, 18; 1Corinthians 5:1-13; 1Corinthians 6:9, 10; 1Timothy 1:19, 20; 2Timothy 2:16-18; Titus 3:10; Rev. 2:2, 14-6, 20). A member guilty of such conduct or doctrine must be cut off from the fellowship of the church (Matthew 18:17; 1Corinthians 5:3-5, 13). Before such action is taken, earnest efforts must be made to bring the offender to repentance (Matthew 18:15-17; Titus 3:10). If these efforts fail, this offender is to be excommunicated, at a congregational meeting, by the church. To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of a 3/4 majority of the members present (2Corinthians 2:6).

b. A suspended member shall be excommunicated if he continues impenitent.

C. Restoration

The purposes of church discipline are to restore a fallen brother or sister and to keep the church pure. Therefore, it is the duty of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a suspended or excommunicated member who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance (2Corinthians 2:6-8). This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church by a 3/4 majority of the members present.

ARTICLE VII – 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. Only those who display repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for Baptism. All such persons should not only be baptized, but also ordinarily be joined to a local church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 5:13, 14). Believing that Baptism is the God-ordained sign of one's personal union with

Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and the door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, we shall receive into the membership of the church those who have been baptized in the Biblical manner, which is by immersion and "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew. 28:19).

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

C. The Lord's Supper

Whereas Baptism is the initiatory ordinance by which one enters the visible church, and should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1Corinthians 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 determine that only true believers are admitted to the Table. In addition, only such believers that are currently members of an evangelical church, or actively pursuing membership in such a church, should partake of the Table.

ARTICLE VIII - OFFICE BEARERS

A. General Statement

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Colossians 1:18). He has ordained that individual churches should be governed by Himself through office bearers whom He appoints, who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Therefore, it is the duty of the whole congregation to seek continually to discover those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary graces and gifts for office bearing. Christ has ordained that local churches are to be administered by elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1Timothy 3:1-13).

B. General Prerequisites

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

B. Elders

1. Those who have been called of God to rule and teach in the church are called elders, pastors, or bishops. These are three interchangeable names designating one and the same office in New Testament church (Acts 20:17, 28; Ephesians 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 (1Timothy 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; Hebrews 13:17). Therefore, elders are obligated to discharge all of the duties specified by God in the Scriptures (particularly in such passages as Acts 20:17, 28ff; 1Peter 5:1-4; and Hebrews 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 (Ephesians 4:11c; 1Timothy 3:2c; 2Timothy 4:1-2; Hebrews 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 purchase or sale of a church building or property), the local church as a whole has a voice (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1Corinthians 5:4-5; 13; 2Corinthians 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 (Matthew 22:21; Luke 12:13-14; Acts 20:28; 1Peter 5:3a; Romans 13:1-7; Ephesians. 5:22-6:9; 1Corinthians 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 (Matthew 18:17; 23:9; 26:31; 2Corinthians 11:19-20; Galatians 2:11; 3John 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); Galatians 2:11; 1Peter 5:1-2; 1Timothy 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 (Hebrews 13:17; note also the Scriptural titles and functions of the office).
4. One crucial aspect of the elders' duties is personally overseeing the flock of God. Fulfillment of this duty shall include regularly and systematically meeting with each member of the church at least twice a year.
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 (1Timothy 5:17ff).
6. Though a plurality of elders is the New Testament norm for every church, the New Testament does not specify the number of elders each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an elder's term of office. One truly called to this office is usually called to it for life. He is a gift of Christ to the church, and the gifts of God are without repentance. Only when an elder fails to meet the necessary Scriptural qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from being an elder. An elder may honorably resign from his office for a time if he feels he is providentially hindered from properly

discharging his pastoral responsibilities. He may at the discretion of the elders and without re-examination by the congregation re-assume the office when these providential hindrances have been removed.

C. Deacons

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

D. Appointment of Office Bearers

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 has appointed 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 (1Timothy 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible. Therefore, each office bearer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership in particular. The Lord's appointment of an individual to either of these offices is recognized by means of that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for the particular office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of office bearers is a matter of such importance that it should never be dealt with without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered. Each member of the congregation 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 congregational meeting for the election of office bearers shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days previous to its being held. The names of all nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. During the discussion the nominee under consideration shall leave the presence of the congregation until he is voted upon. The Scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the nominee's graces and gifts shall be scrutinized in the light of them. The congregation should seek unity of mind concerning each nominee, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election. This vote shall take place by written ballot subsequent to a full and free discussion oriented to the relevant Scriptural passages. The vote shall stand as it is first given in the written ballot.

c. Ordination

Following the election of an office bearer there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the office bearer shall be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the eldership. This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the whole church (Acts 13:1-3). The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an office

bearer-elect. Should the elders be unable to conscientiously ordain an office bearer-elect (1Timothy 5:22), they shall inform each member of their reasons in an appropriate manner.

E. Review of Office Bearers

1. There shall be a review of each office bearer's qualifications for the office (1Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:6-9; Acts 6:3) four years after his ordination into the office and every fourth year thereafter for as long as he occupies the office in this church. The procedure for review will be the same as that outlined in Paragraph 2.b above entitled "Election".
2. There may arise reasons that would require all office bearer to be reviewed before the regularly scheduled time. Such a review meeting may be called by a majority of the elders (or the other elders in the case of an elder). The members may also request such a meeting. This request must be set forth in writing with the signatures of one-third of the members in good standing. It must be presented to the elders, who shall in turn make the proper announcement of the meeting.
3. Such a review meeting would also follow the procedure outlined in Paragraph 2.b entitled "Election".

F. Full Support of Elders

1. Though all elders are equal as to the authority of their office, not all elders possess qualifications warranting full financial support in the office. The Bible teaches that special ability in ruling the church and, more especially, in public teaching and preaching are gifts worthy of full financial support (Galatians 6:6; 1Timothy 5:17; 1Corinthians 9:1-14). Thus, before it undertakes his full support, the congregation must recognize that an elder possesses special ministerial gifts and that he is excelling in the employment of those gifts for the benefit of the church, in ways appropriate to his opportunities. Special caution should be exercised in giving full support to an elder for the following reasons:
 - (1) full support necessitates his removal from a secular vocation, which, in the interests of Christ's Kingdom and of his family, might be a more advantageous position for him to occupy;
 - (2) a major portion of the church's financial stewardship is involved, for which its Head will hold it accountable; and
 - (3) a fully supported elder has a greater influence upon the congregation, for good or ill.
2. In recognizing any man for full support the procedures outlined in Article VIII, Section D, Paragraph 2, shall be followed. Special attention shall be given to these passages: Galatians 6:6; 1Timothy 5:17; and 1Corinthians 9:1-14. Ordination would not be appropriate for a man who is already an elder of the church. The provisions of this section apply to any proportion of financial support required by all increase of ministry that would hinder an elder's full-time employment in a secular vocation.

ARTICLE IX - OFFICIAL BOARD

In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's", this church shall have an official Board of Trustees. The official board shall consist of pastors (elders) as voting members and deacons as non-voting members, with the chairmanship rotation amongst the pastors. Officers of the board shall serve as the legal representatives of the church.

ARTICLE X - CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

A. Calling of Meetings

There shall be an annual business meeting of the church held in January or February. At the annual meeting reports shall be given by the elders and others appointed, including budget and review of membership. Also, a nominations ballot shall be cast (see Article VIII, Section D, Paragraph 2.a).

B. Special Meetings

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

the proper announcement of the meeting. Every congregational meeting at which business is to be transacted shall be announced at regular services for at least two (2) successive Sundays. Other congregational 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 member should regard their presence at a duly called congregational meeting with the same seriousness with which they would regard their attendance at a stated service of worship; however, no less than fifty percent (50%) of the voting membership shall constitute a quorum. It shall be our goal to prayerfully discern the mind of God so that in all matters of church business it may be said of us, as it was said of that church business meeting recorded in Acts 6, that this thing "pleased the whole multitude".

However, in situations in which this unanimity is not realized, no less than a 3/4 majority of those voting will make a resolution valid. In other matters wherein the Constitution and/or By-Laws require a different proportionate vote, this three-fourths figure will be overridden by the express statements of the Constitution and By-Laws regarding those categories of business.

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