

# Country Oaks Baptist Church

20915 Schout Road - Tehachapi, CA, 93561

## *Constitution & Bylaws*

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## COBC CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I. PURPOSE.....	2
ARTICLE II. STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE.....	3
ARTICLE III. GOVERNMENT.....	7
ARTICLE IV. ADMINISTRATION.....	9
ARTICLE V. MEMBERSHIP.....	9
ARTICLE VI. AMENDMENTS.....	10

## COBC BYLAWS

ARTICLE I. GOVERNMENT.....	10
ARTICLE II. ADMINISTRATION.....	15
ARTICLE III. WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGE CEREMONIES.....	16
ARTICLE IV. MEMBERSHIP.....	16
ARTICLE V. MEETINGS.....	18
ARTICLE VI. FINANCES AND PROPERTY RIGHTS.....	19
ARTICLE VII. AMENDMENTS.....	20

# *COBC*

## *Constitution*

Since it pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call certain of His servants to unite here in the year 1988 under the name of Country Oaks Baptist Church (COBC) of Tehachapi, California, for the worship of God and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and since He has sustained and prospered this work to the present day; giving first place to the work of the Kingdom of God and freedom to do all things by divine guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the Word of God; we declare and establish this Constitution and Bylaws to express the principles of our faith and to govern this body in an orderly manner. To this end the details of the church ministries and their administration will be expressed in the Ministry Action Plan (MAP) Procedure Manual as compiled through the Board of Elders.

### **ARTICLE I. PURPOSE**

Our objective, as a church, is to show love which testifies that we are Christ's disciples. Our love for Christ is shown by obedience and faith. Our love for fellow believers is shown by service. Our love for the unsaved is shown by outreach.

This objective will be evident when we as a body:

- **Exalt the Savior** by providing a biblical climate for worship that includes preaching, music, prayer, testimonies, ordinances and offerings.
- **Actively equip the saints** by instruction and encouragement to consecrate themselves to Spirit-led service and obedience to God and through discipleship, to discover, develop, and apply their spiritual gifts.

- **Evangelize the unsaved** through obedience to the Great Commission at home and abroad, by leading unbelievers to faith in Christ and identification with a local body of believers.

## **ARTICLE II. STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE**

We recognize and believe in the authority of the Bible as the Word of God. Creeds, or concise doctrinal summaries of the doctrines of Scripture, are subordinate to Scripture as our only infallible rule of faith and life. Although creeds are not infallible, we do believe that creeds are authoritative insofar as they accurately summarize the teachings of Scripture. We therefore offer in humility and sincerity the following statement of doctrine:

**Section 2.1 Holy Scripture.** The Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the divinely inspired Word of God and infallible and inerrant in their original writings. They are perfect and complete, the only written revelation of God to man and authoritative in all matters.<sup>1</sup>

**Section 2.2 The Triune God.** There is only one living and true God who as creator of the universe eternally exists in three persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

**God the Father.** He is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He reveals Himself as a merciful and loving Father seeking fellowship with mankind.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Galatians 1:11-12; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Luke 24:44

<sup>2</sup> Genesis 1:1-2, 26; Deuteronomy 6:4; Ephesians 4:6

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 21:3

**God the Son.** He is revealed as Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God; born of a virgin, He is both God and man sent “to seek and to save that which was lost.” Luke 19:10<sup>4</sup>

**God the Holy Spirit.** He is sent forth from the Father and the Son to indwell the saints, to be their counselor and comforter, to empower them for service, and to seal them to Himself. His work is to convict the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He bestows spiritual gifts upon the believers for the perfecting of the saints.<sup>5</sup>

**Section 2.3 Man.** Man was created in the image of God without sin. He voluntarily fell from his sinless state, and sin has passed on to all mankind alienating all from God resulting in physical and spiritual death.<sup>6</sup>

**Section 2.4 Salvation.** Because mankind is hopelessly lost, we are in need of a Savior. Salvation has been provided through the substitutionary death of Jesus upon the cross. Through the shedding of His blood, we have the forgiveness of sin. Salvation is a gift entirely by the grace of God. Through repentance and faith in His death and resurrection we have a living hope and “through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”<sup>7</sup>

**Section 2.5 The Church.** Christ’s Church is composed of all born-again believers. The local church includes members of Christ’s Church who are united together for:

- **Worshiping God (John 4:23-24; Hebrews 10:25)**

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<sup>4</sup> John 1:1-2, 14, 18; 3:16; Matthew 1:18-21

<sup>5</sup> John 16:5-16; Acts 1:8; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:7-14; John 15:26

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 1:27; 2:7; 3:1-19; Psalm 14:1-3; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:11-15

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:5; 1 John 1:7-9; 5:10-13; Hebrews 10:5-25; Revelation 1:5-6; 5:9-10

- Ministering to the saints (Galatians 6:2; John 13:14; 1 Peter 4:10)
- Evangelizing and discipling (John 21:15-17; Acts 1:8)
- Keeping the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
  - We believe in, and practice, baptizing believers by immersion. (Matthew 3:13-17; Acts 8:38-39)
  - We believe that the Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church remember Christ's death and anticipate His second coming. (Matthew 3:13-17; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; 8:35-39; 16:30-33; 20:7; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Corinthians 10:16,21; 11:23-29; Colossians 2:12)
- Meeting regularly (Hebrews 10:25)
- Being members of one body (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 12:12–27; Ephesians 3:6, 5:23; Colossians 1:18, 24)
- Appointing a plurality of elders that will shepherd the congregation towards greater maturity (Acts 14:23)
- Practicing church discipline (Matthew 18:15-20)
- Fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20)

**Section 2.6 The Last Things.** One day, all of mankind will be judged. The believers will be rewarded for their acts of righteousness and the unbelievers will be judged for their deeds and unbelief. “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 9:28; Cf. Daniel 12:1-3; 1 Corinthians 3:9-17; Revelation 20:11- 21:8

**Section 2.7 Marriage.** Marriage has been established and instituted by God from the dawn of the human race, as described in the early chapters of Genesis. It has been codified in the Mosaic Law, and the Old Testament compared it to the relationship between God and His people.

Jesus Christ our Lord explained the original intention and core elements of marriage. When quoting the writings of Moses, Christ reminded us that “a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cleave unto his wife, that the two shall become one flesh.”<sup>9</sup>

The Apostles give explicit instructions on this union, teaching that marriage is a type of Christ and His Bride, the Church. As such, the Church views marriage as a profound spiritual institution established by God. In as much as Christians join in a union as man and wife, it is both an act of obedience to God and an act of worship.

In accordance with Holy Scripture, COBC defines “marriage” as the exclusive union of one biological man and one biological woman that is a lifetime commitment, as described in the Scriptures.<sup>10</sup> For more on wedding ceremonies at COBC, see: (Bylaws Article III).

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<sup>9</sup> Matthew 19:5

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 1:27; 2:18-24; Malachi 2:11-16; Matthew 19:3-12; Mark 10:7; 1 Corinthians 7:1-40; Ephesians 5:21-33; 1 Peter 3:1-7

**Section 2.8 Human Sexuality.** Legitimate sexual relations are exercised solely within marriage as described in Holy Scriptures. Hence, sexual activity outside of marriage including, but not limited to adultery, premarital sex (fornication), homosexuality, and pedophilia are inconsistent with the Bible and the Church. Further, lascivious conduct, transgender behavior, and the creation, distribution, and/or viewing of pornography are incompatible with the biblical witness and the teachings of the Church.<sup>11</sup>

**Section 2.9 Affirmation of Doctrine.** Every elder, teacher, member, ministry leader or worker, volunteer, or employee shall affirm the COBC Statement of Doctrine. All of the above mentioned shall conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent therewith.

## **ARTICLE III. GOVERNMENT**

### **Section 3.1 The Office of the Elder**

3.1.1 The terms elder (πρεσβύτερος), pastor (ποιμνη), and overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) are used to describe the same office in the New Testament. The words carry different nuances of responsibility within that office but all describe the same office.

3.1.2 The office of elder is responsible for the spiritual oversight of the church as servants of the Lord, including the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, the building up of the body of Christ, and the orderly and timely conduct of the church's affairs. Elders shall proclaim the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and serve as guardians of the doctrinal truth taught within the church and shepherds of the congregation.

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<sup>11</sup> Exodus 22:16-19; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, 15-20; 7:1-12; Ephesians 2:1-3; 4:17-19; 5:1-7; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 4:1-5

3.1.3 Elders shall act as the trustees of the church and are vested with executive authority to manage the affairs of the church, both spiritual and temporal, under the direction of Scripture, the Constitution and Bylaws, and the laws of the State of California and the United States.

3.1.4 Elders shall carry out their ministry with humility before God and man.<sup>12</sup>

## **Section 3.2 The Elder Board**

The elder board consists of biblically qualified men who serve in pastoral ministry and oversight of the ministry of the church, either vocationally (in paid positions) or as lay elders (non-paid). All elders must meet the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:6–9. They must be in full agreement with the church’s doctrine and submit to the authority of Scripture in life and teaching.

3.2.1 Lay Elders, though not financially compensated by the church, share in the pastoral care, teaching, and leadership of the church. Lay Elders do so in the same spiritual office as Vocational Elders, serving on the elder board as examples to the flock and stewards of the gospel.

3.2.2 Vocational Elders are employed by the church in various full-time or part-time ministry roles. They share in the spiritual leadership and shepherding of the church, and their responsibilities may include teaching, counseling, administration, missions, or other areas of pastoral oversight. They serve on the elder board and serve in partnership with the Lead Teaching Elder.

3.2.3 The Lead Teaching Elder serves vocationally and is set apart to lead in the preaching of the Word. Through faithful exposition of Scripture, he helps shape the church’s theological vision and

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<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 4:11-14; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1–3; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5

supports its shepherding ministry. Though he carries a distinct preaching role, he serves as one among the elders, sharing in the collective responsibility for the ministry of the church as part of a plurality of leadership.

## **ARTICLE IV. ADMINISTRATION**

### **Section 4.1 The Office of Deacon**

Deacons are biblically qualified men<sup>13</sup> who serve the church under the direction of the elders. Their purpose is to assist in caring for the physical and practical needs of the church body, freeing the elders to focus on prayer and the ministry of the Word.

The Deacon ministry shall include, but not be limited to serving widows or otherwise disadvantaged persons, such as the sick and the needy, and to prepare and serve the Lord's Supper.

## **ARTICLE V. MEMBERSHIP**

### **Section 5.1 Eligibility**

All individuals who publicly and verbally profess personal faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, have subsequently submitted to believer's baptism and are willing to submit to the authority of this church in matters of spiritual life and discipline, may be eligible to become a member of the church. (For more on membership see Bylaws, Article IV.)

### **Section 5.2 Church Discipline**

5.2.1 Church discipline is a biblical process, carried out in love and humility, for the restoration of believers who are living in unrepentant sin, and for the protection and purity of the church.

5.2.2 The goal of discipline is always repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth. This process is guided by the teaching of

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 6:1–6; 1 Timothy 3:8–13

Scripture, especially Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 5; Galatians 6:1; and Titus 3:10. (For the process of Church Discipline see the Bylaws, Article IV.)

## **ARTICLE VI. AMENDMENTS**

Amendments to this Constitution and Bylaws shall be made by a two-thirds majority of the votes of attending members in good standing. (For more on amendments see Bylaws, Article VII.)

# *COBC*

## *BYLAWS*

### **ARTICLE I. GOVERNMENT**

#### **Section 1.1. Selection of Lay Elders.**

1.1.1 A candidate for lay Eldership may be nominated by any church member in good standing. Nominations shall be submitted to the existing Elder Board.

1.1.2 The Elder Board shall examine the candidate's qualifications according to the biblical standards set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

1.1.3 Upon satisfactory examination, the candidate shall be presented to the congregation for consideration. The church membership shall be given no less than 30 days to bring any concerns regarding the candidate's qualifications to the candidate.

1.1.4 Should 1.1.3 not resolve the issue, members should submit their concerns in writing to the Elder Board.

1.1.5 If no disqualifying concerns arise within the 30-day period, the Elder Board may officially appoint the candidate as a lay Elder.

#### **Section 1.2. Selection of Vocational Elders**

1.2.1 The process for selecting vocational Elders shall follow the same foundational steps outlined for lay Elders in Section 1.1, including nomination, examination, and congregational consideration.

1.2.2 In addition to those steps, the Elder Board may identify or receive applications from qualified candidates for vocational Eldership.

1.2.3 After adequate consideration by the congregation, the Elder Board shall conduct a ballot poll of the church membership to serve as input for the final decision.

1.2.4 Upon completion of this process, the Elder Board may officially appoint the candidate as a vocational Elder.

### **Section 1.3 Selection of the Lead Teaching Elder**

1.3.1 In the event of a vacancy in the position of Lead Teaching Elder, the Elder Board shall appoint a Pulpit Council consisting of at least two Elders, one Deacon, and two members of the congregation in good standing. This Council shall interview candidates and submit recommendations to the Elder Board.

1.3.2 The evaluation process for Lead Teaching Elder shall follow the same foundational steps outlined in Section 1.1, with the following modification:

- A two-thirds majority of the votes of attending members in good standing, conducted by ballot, is required to proceed with the selection.

1.3.3 The final decision to appoint the Lead Teaching Elder shall be made by the Elder Board, informed by the recommendation of the Pulpit Council and the input of the congregation.

## **Section 1.4 The Board of Elders**

1.4.1 There shall never be less than three Elders. The total number of Elders shall be determined by the need of the church. There should not be more vocational Elders than lay Elders.

1.4.2 Regular Elder Board meetings shall have two sessions. One session shall be open to the members of the congregation by appointment to request prayer or express their thoughts, desires, and questions to the Elders. The other session will be a closed session for the Elders to conduct their normal business.

1.4.3 Due to the call of God to serve as an Elder, the term of office will last until such time that he is biblically or morally disqualified, unable to perform the duties of the office, or voluntarily vacates the office.

1.4.4 There will be a mandatory annual review of each Elder by the remainder of the existing board. This review will take into consideration the qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. The purpose of the annual review will be to establish biblical qualification and continued sense of calling for each Elder.

## **Section 1.5 Organization and Function of the Elder Board**

1.5.1 The Elders will approach decisions in a prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit and consensus of the Board. If there is disagreement on an issue and not resolved by subsequent discussion, the decision will be postponed for more study and prayer until consensus is reached. (Acts 15:1-29)

1.5.2 Vocational Elders shall not vote on the final determination of salaries.

1.5.3 The Board's first order of business, at their regular meeting following the annual meeting of the church, shall be the selection of a new chairman and secretary for the current year. The chairman shall be chosen from among the laity serving as Elders, not the paid staff. The secretary shall keep accurate records of the Board's proceedings and present written quarterly and annual reports to the church.

1.5.4 There shall be continual classes, or as often as needed, regarding the office of Elder and it shall be open to all members of the church. However, if a man is aspiring for the office of Elder, the class is mandatory. The class may be taught by anyone qualified to teach, at the discretion of the Elder Board. There shall also be times of instructions for Elders, taught by the Elders, or whom they may select.

## **Section 1.6. Discipline and Removal of an Elder**

1.6.1 Should an elder not be able to fulfill his duties in office, he shall submit a letter of resignation to the Board, including the date of termination.

1.6.2 Should any member of the congregation have reason based on fact as to why an Elder has failed in the qualifications for the office, that member should discuss the matter with the Elder, according to Matthew 18:15-20. If it cannot be resolved, then the member with two or more witnesses must present the matter to the presiding Elder Board. (1 Timothy 5:19-21)

1.6.3 Upon receipt of the accusation, the Elder Board shall review the accusation and give the Elder the opportunity to reply. The Elder shall be suspended from the Elder Board until the matter is resolved.

1.6.4 In the event dismissal of the Elder is necessary, the Board shall call for a special meeting of the church to present the accusations and findings. (1Timothy 5:20)

1.6.5 However, if the measure of discipline is less severe than dismissal, a special meeting of the church is optional, at the discretion of the Board.

1.6.6 Above all, the proceedings should be handled in love with the object of all proceedings being the restoration, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of all involved. (Matthew 18:15-20)

## **Section 1.7 Resignation from the Elder Board**

1.7.1 Should any Lay Elder desire to vacate his office, he may do so at his discretion.

1.7.2. Should any Vocational or Lead Teaching Elder voluntarily vacate his office, four weeks' notice shall be given to the Board of Elders in writing.

1.7.3 The authority and responsibilities of the Elder reside in the office, not in the individual. Therefore, when an Elder vacates his office, his term and authority as Elder cease.

## **ARTICLE II. ADMINISTRATION**

### **Section 2.1 Selection and Term Of Deacons**

2.1.1 The Deacons shall be chosen in the same manner as the Elders. Their term of office will be consistent with that of Elder.

2.1.2 It is recommended that the number of Deacons be determined by a ratio of one Deacon to ten households. An annual review of each Deacon will be performed in a manner consistent with the annual Elder review.

## **ARTICLE III. WEDDINGS AND MARRIAGE CEREMONIES**

### **Section 3.1 Definition and Purpose**

All weddings performed at COBC are to be acts of Christian obedience and worship, and shall align with the church's Statement of Faith, Bylaws, and Constitution, specifically Article II, Section 2.7 of the Constitution.

### **Section 3.2 Authority and Oversight**

Only Elders and pastors approved by the Board of Elders may officiate weddings at COBC. Guest pastors or wedding officials must affirm the doctrinal statement and receive approval by the Board of Elders.

### **Section 3.3 Compliance and Discipline**

If an Elder knowingly officiates a wedding inconsistent with these Bylaws, he will be subject to review and may face termination by the Board of Elders.

### **Section 3.4 Recognition of Civil Marriages**

A civil government's sanction of a union will be recognized by COBC only if it aligns with the biblical definition of marriage as affirmed in these Bylaws and the Statement of Doctrine.

## **ARTICLE IV. MEMBERSHIP**

### **Section 4.1 Membership Process**

4.1.1 All applicants must be in agreement with the statement of Doctrine, Constitution and Bylaws, and attend the required membership classes as agreed upon by the Elders or by exception.

4.1.2 Eligible candidates for membership will meet with two

Elders or an Elder and a Deacon to complete the membership process (questions & answers on the Constitution & Bylaws and presented to the congregation).

## **Section 4.2 Responsibilities of Members**

4.2.1 Those brought into membership agree to worship, grow, and serve as functioning members of the body of Christ.

4.2.2 As such, they will give, minister, evangelize, study, and seek to be a blessing to others, sharing in the joys and sufferings of the church (1 Cor. 12:26). Members are to be a source of unity rather than gossip or dissension, contributing to the health of the church for the sake of the gospel.

4.2.3 They will commit to supporting the leadership, participating in the life of the church alongside their families, and cultivating a growing love for the body of Christ. In humility, members will set aside personal preferences to serve others and will count it a privilege to love and serve as equal members of His body.

## **Section 4.3 Good Standing**

A member shall be considered in good standing when there is a continued behavior to live in conformity with the Scriptures and this Constitution and Bylaws, having demonstrated a conscientious effort to attend the services of the church and contribute to its support as God has prospered.

## **Section 4.4 Inactive Status**

When a member has failed to fulfill this responsibility, without valid reason, then his or her name shall be transferred to the inactive roll and voting rights suspended.

## **Section 4.5 Termination of Membership**

The Board of Elders shall make a conscientious effort to restore inactive members to fellowship and service. After one year has elapsed and the member has not manifested an attempt to improve the status of membership, the inactive member will be removed from the church roll. The member shall be notified of the action in writing.

## **Section 4.6 Church Discipline**

4.6.1 The steps of discipline will be taken in the following order in accordance with Matthew 18:

1. Private correction (v. 15),
2. Witnessed admonition and Elder involvement (v. 16),
3. The church calling them to repentance (v. 17),
4. Removal from church membership and exclusion from fellowship (v. 17)

4.6.2 The Elders oversee the discipline process with pastoral care and in submission to Christ. If repentance occurs at any point, forgiveness and restoration are offered and the process is stopped.

## **ARTICLE V. MEETINGS**

### **Section 5.1 Annual Meeting**

5.1.1 The annual meeting of the church shall be held within 60 days following the pre-annual meeting. Accordingly, the pre-annual meeting shall be held in November. The time, place and occasion for both meetings shall be determined by the Board of Elders, and due notice given to the church.

5.1.2 The purpose of this meeting shall be to review the church ministries of the past year, to preview the ministries for the coming year and to complete the confirmation process of Elders, Deacons, and budget.

### **Section 5.2 Special Meetings**

The Board of Elders may call special meetings as circumstances dictate with due notice given to the church a minimum of seven (7) days in advance.

### **Section 5.3 Rules of Order**

When a question of parliamentary procedure and conduct arises, Robert's Rules of Order shall be followed.

## **ARTICLE VI. FINANCES AND PROPERTY RIGHTS**

### **Section 6.1 Ownership**

This church will have the power to buy, own and sell real property in its name. All properties of the church will belong to the membership who abide by this Constitution & Bylaws.

### **Section 6.2 Dissolution clause**

Should conditions arise under which the church cannot continue to exist, the church property shall be given to a non-profit, evangelical, Christ-centered cause.

### **Section 6.3 Stewardship**

This shall be at the discretion of the remaining members and no assets shall go to individual members of the church.

## **ARTICLE VII. AMENDMENTS**

7.1.1 Any member in good standing may propose amendments, but amendments must be presented in writing to the Board of Elders at least 30 days before being presented to the congregation for discussion.

7.1.2 Amendments must be presented to the members of the church at least 30 days prior to any official vote on the matter.

7.1.3 The presentation may be through bulletin inserts, electronic media, pulpit announcements, or any similar form of communication with the church membership.

7.1.4 The vote shall be by ballot taken at the next special or annual meeting with only those members in good standing and eighteen years or older eligible to vote.

