

## Proposed Constitution

### Preamble

We, the members of [Church Plant], 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 is intended to preserve the liberties and define the responsibilities of each individual member of this church, including its officers. It is our desire that this local church be Christ-ruled, Elder-led, Deacon-served, and Congregationally-engaged. As members of [Church Plant], 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 [Church Plant] of City, State.

### 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 Scripture by enjoying and promoting His worship; edifying and equipping the saints; engaging the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ both locally and worldwide; seeking whenever possible to both plant and strengthen other churches, promoting biblical faithfulness and purity in all the assemblies of Christ; and seeking to minister relief to the needy, especially among the saints.

### Article III: Statement of Faith

#### Section I: Biblical Authority and our Reason for Confessing our Faith

The Holy Bible is the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God and is therefore the only basis for any Statement of Faith. However, since most churches (even erring ones) might agree 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.

#### Section II: Our Confession of Faith

We accept the 1689 2nd London Baptist Confession of Faith (with minor exceptions listed below) as our primary confession of faith. 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.

#### Exceptions and wording changes that would make the confession fully acceptable:

- The identity of the antichrist in chapter 26, paragraph 4. The following wording change is, however, fully acceptable:
  - The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, all power for the calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner; neither can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof, but is ~~that~~ [a great] antichrist, ~~that~~ [a great] man of sin, and [a] son of perdition, ~~that~~ [who] exalts himself in the church against Christ, and all that is called God; whom the Lord shall destroy with the brightness of his coming.

## DRAFT

- The imposition of formal voting to call an elder or deacon into office in chapter 26, paragraph 9. The following wording change is, however, fully acceptable:
  - The way appointed by Christ for the calling of any person, fitted and gifted by the Holy Spirit, unto the office of bishop or elder in a church, is, that he be chosen thereunto by the common ~~suffrage~~ [assent] of the church itself; and solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with imposition of hands of the eldership of the church, if there be any before constituted therein; and of a deacon that he be chosen by the like ~~suffrage~~ [assent], and set apart by prayer, and the like imposition of hands.

### Section III: Our Views of Marriage and Sexual Ethics

The 1689 2nd London Baptist Confession of Faith clearly affirms in chapter 25, paragraph 1 that “Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband.” It seems necessary because of the present widespread degradation of sexual morality in our culture to state our views on this matter more specifically and formally.

We believe marriage is a monogamous, heterosexual union instituted and ordained by God (Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33). As such, it is to be an exclusive covenantal union of one biologically born man and one biologically born woman for the purpose of a lifetime of mutual commitment and companionship. A civil government’s sanction of a union will be recognized as a legitimate marriage by this church only to the extent that it is consistent with this belief.

We believe that the term “marriage” has only one meaning - it is a union sanctioned by God which joins one biologically born man and one biologically born woman in a single, exclusive relationship, as delineated in Scripture.

We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to only occur between a biologically born man and a biologically born woman who are married to each other.

We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity is to occur outside of a marriage between a biologically born man and a biologically born woman.

We believe that any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, pornography, or any attempt to change one’s gender, or disagreement with one’s biological gender, is sinful and offensive to God.

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of the church as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the church members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by our church in any capacity, or who serve as volunteers, should abide by and agree to this Position Statement on Marriage and Human Sexuality and conduct themselves accordingly.

We believe the recognition of same-sex or transgender marriages, civil unions, or domestic partnerships is prohibited by Scripture. Rather than promoting the family and the common good of a community, the recognition and sanction of same-sex marriage, civil unions, or domestic partnerships is detrimental to a society. Such a redefinition of marriage devalues the institution, the family, and the unique role of both a biologically born man and a biologically born woman in a child’s life.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to one’s created identity as male or female to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking forgiveness and mercy through Jesus Christ.

## DRAFT

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with the Scriptures nor the doctrine and practices of this church.

The Bible explains the original intention and core elements of marriage. In the New Testament, various epistles give explicit instructions on the union of a biologically born man and a biologically born woman. In light of this revelation from God, [Church Plant] views marriage as a profound spiritual institution established by God. Due to the nature and importance of marriage in the biblical record, [Church Plant] adopts the following policy:

Only licensed or ordained pastors or directors of [Church Plant] shall officiate at marriage ceremonies conducted on church property or in association with the church. Officiants not employed by [Church Plant] may officiate weddings on church premises or in association with the church only after agreeing to follow the marriage beliefs and policies of [Church Plant], including this document. Such officiants need the approval of the pastor team before officiating at any wedding on the church premises or in association with the church. Pastors or staff employed by [Church Plant] shall not officiate at a same-sex, transgender, or trans-sexual marriage ceremony, regardless of where it is held.

Applicants desiring to participate in a [Church Plant] premarital course, have a ceremony performed by a pastor or officiant employed by [Church Plant], and/or use the facilities of the church, shall affirm their agreement with the marriage beliefs and policies of [Church Plant], including this document, and shall conduct themselves in a manner consistent therewith. Applicants shall receive the necessary premarital counseling as required by [Church Plant] before a ceremony may be performed by a pastor or officiant.

We reserve the right to decline the request of any person to use [Church Plant] facilities or property for a ceremony when, in our judgment, there are significant concerns that one or both of the applicants may not be qualified to enter into the sacred union of marriage for theological, doctrinal, moral, or legal reasons. We reserve the right to decline the request of any person to use [Church Plant] facilities or property to host or house any group, function, or event (i.e., wedding, marriage vow renewal, funeral, baptism, child dedication, etc.) inconsistent with the biblical standards for marriage and the marriage beliefs and policies of [Church Plant], including this document.

### **Section IV: Our Views of the Sanctity of Life**

The 1689 2nd London Baptist Confession of Faith clearly affirms the abiding validity of the moral law as summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments. We are, thus, bound as a church by the Sixth Commandment: “You shall not murder” and the sanctity of life which it enshrines. Nevertheless, because of the abounding ignorance of God’s law and its most basic implications in our society, we express our faith in the sanctity of life as follows: We believe that all human life is sacred and created by God. Human life at all stages, including preborn and end-of-life, should be valued, protected, and respected (Psalm 51; 139). We believe, however, that the sanctity of life does not contradict, but actually requires capital punishment in some cases.

### **Article IV: Church Covenant**

#### **Section I: Our New Covenant Confidence**

God has graciously entered into a New Covenant with His people (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Heb. 8:7-13; 10:16,17; 13:20,21) through the work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:6), whose obedience and blood infallibly secure all of its benefits for them (Mat. 26:26-28; Heb. 13:20,21). By making us members of the one body of Christ (Rom. 12:4,5; 1

Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:25), the New Covenant lays upon us responsibilities, not only to God, but also to each other. 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. By His redeeming work, Christ secured for His people the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, by whose gift of faith we obey, not to establish our own righteousness before God but to express our gratitude for grace. [Church Plant] 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 II: Our New Covenant Commitments**

### **1. Our Commitment to God**

We will seek to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to live before Him in such a 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 and faithfully, observing the public and corporate worship which He commands on the Lord's Day sabbath, while also 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.

### **2. 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:

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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 (Gal. 6:10). 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.

### 3. 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 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 I: General Statement

This church is a Reformed Baptist church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, who alone is the Head of the Church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). The elders are entrusted with the oversight and governance of the church, including the recognition, reception, and removal of members, and are accountable to Christ for the faithful discharge of this responsibility (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17).

## DRAFT

The members participate in the life of the church through prayer, counsel, and affirmation, and are called to uphold the truth of the gospel and the purity of the church (Gal. 1:8–9; Heb. 10:24–25).

### **Section II: 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 (Acts 2:41,42; Acts 4:4), added to (Acts 2:47; 5:14), and even subtracted from (Mat 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:12,13; 2 Cor. 2:6).
- B. Each local church of Christ is called to recognize and set apart leaders and representatives from among its members, under the guidance of its elders and in the context of congregational awareness and affirmation, as those whom the Lord Himself has raised up and qualified for such service (Acts 6:1–6; Acts 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19, 23; Acts 20:28), thus functioning as a formal body with recognized officers (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23).
- C. Practical fulfillment of the Great Commission requires church membership (Matt. 28:18-20). 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 that Christ had commanded (Acts 2:38-42; 1 Cor. 4:1-7; Titus 1:7).
- 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 III: Responsibilities of Church Members**

Members of [Church Plant] are expected (1) first and foremost, to have a good confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Tim. 6:12); (2) to have obeyed the Lord Jesus in the ordinance of believer's baptism (Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 2:38–41); (3) to be faithful in all the duties essential to the Christian life (Col. 1:10; Titus 2:11–12); (4) to attend regularly the stated services of this church unless providentially hindered (Heb. 10:24–25); (5) to submit cheerfully to the eldership of the church (Heb. 13:17); (6) to give cheerfully to its support and its causes as God has prospered them (2 Cor. 9:6–8; 2 Cor. 8:12); (7) to participate in its organized work and make available to the church such talents and abilities as God has endowed them with (1 Pet. 4:10–11; Rom. 12:4–8).

### **Section IV: Candidacy and Reception**

Any person may offer himself or herself as a candidate for membership in [Church Plant]. We understand the scriptural priority of serving the Lord in one of His local 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.

## DRAFT

Members are to be received only upon the approval of the elders and by the common assent of the church. The method of receiving members into [Church Plant] 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 ensure the proposed member understands what is expected of church members. (See Above: Section III: Responsibilities of Church Members)

It is probable that, in many cases, achieving the above goals will require more than one meeting with the pastor(s) and may take more time than most churches do to bring new members into formal church membership. However, the importance of Christ's church and the seriousness of membership therein demands careful consideration before adding members to the church. While prospective members are going through the membership process, they may still benefit from the church's general ministry and pastoral care.

Step 2: When the pastoral interview process has been satisfactorily completed, 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 candidate's desire to become a member.
- B. The prospective member's testimony will be made available to the members of the church.
- C. An allowance of a period of not less than four weeks for the members to review the testimony, and voice either recommendations or concerns to the pastors regarding the church receiving the candidate into membership.
  1. Ideally, members would show hospitality to the candidate during this time, both to promote a welcoming fellowship and to ensure that any recommendations or concerns are valid. However, it is not required for each individual member to do so.

Step 3: After time has been allotted for the completion of Step 2, the membership candidate will be approved or rejected by the elders, taking due consideration of the input of the membership and the importance of Christ's church.

Step 4: If the candidate is accepted as a member, they will be officially received into membership in a public worship service. If the candidate has not yet been baptized, baptism will be administered at this time.

## **Section V: 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 [Church Plant] will be terminated in one of the following three ways:

## DRAFT

- A. Physical Death: Physical death necessarily 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 the transfer of membership in accordance with scriptural principles.
- C. Exclusion
  - 1. Exclusion, not under excommunication: In some cases, a person's membership may need to be terminated for reasons that, in the judgment of the elders, may not warrant excommunication. The church shall exclude such persons from its membership roll, without the exercise of excommunication. Such cases may include:
    - i. The resignation of a member who concludes that he is not a Christian.
    - ii. The exclusion of a member whose conduct warrants losing the blessing of associating with the church for reasons that the elders may deem satisfactory (2 Thess 3:14-15).
  - 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 Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity and peace of the church (Matt. 18:15ff; 1 Cor. 5:1 ff; Rom. 16:17; Tit. 3:10, 11). (See Below: Section VI: Church Discipline)

### **Section VI: Church Discipline**

As a body of Christian believers, we members of [Church Plant] must all 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 (1 Cor. 12:12-27; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25, Prov. 3:12). 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 (Eph. 4:15-16). There is to be mutual edification as each member exercises his gifts and graces, and seeks to promote the holiness of the rest (Heb. 3:12-13, 10:24). 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 general formative discipline makes the application of church discipline necessary.

Church 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. Church discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine, disorderly behavior, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In all such cases, reasonable efforts must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition (Matt. 18:15-20; Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20).

In the case of private sin and personal offenses, the instructions in Matthew 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).

- A. A member of [Church Plant] 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. This may take place more than once if necessary. If he repents, then you have gained your brother, and the process ends.

## DRAFT

- B. 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.
  - 2. If the erring brother is indeed 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 church discipline. This discipline is led by the elders, involves all members of the church, and occurs in a public setting. The following two steps characterize formal public church discipline.

- C. 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, if the erring member refuses still, will bring the matter before the church. Since the next step is excommunication, this step normally requires that 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 (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20), collective urging from fellow members to repent, and temporary suspension of certain privileges of church membership, such as the right to participate in the Lord's Supper (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6,14). Such suspensions shall be enacted by the elders' consensus.
- D. When other scriptural means of restoring an offender have failed, the church must be willing to exclude an offending member (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13, 2 Thess. 3:14 - (See Above: Section V: Termination of Membership)).
  - 1. Such exclusion shall be carried out under the leadership and authority of the elders, with the full knowledge, opportunity for input, and solemn assent of the members.
  - 2. The discipline itself best achieves its intended purpose (repentance and restoration) by the collective cooperation of the body, as the "punishment by the majority" requires the members together to recognize and treat the offender as outside the fellowship of the church (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Cor. 2:6).
  - 3. All acts of church discipline, including exclusion by excommunication, must be lovingly carried out for the glory of Christ, the welfare and purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6), with the goal of eventually restoring the offender to good standing in the church (2 Cor. 2:7).
  - 4. While exclusion by 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 that 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.
  - 5. Any member currently under the process of church discipline may not present accusations against others until the elders determine their own process to be resolved.

## Section VII: 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 evidence of repentance (2 Cor. 2:6-8). Thus, any person whose membership has been terminated for any offense may be restored upon evidence of his repentance and

reformation. Such repentance should include confessing one's sins before God and to the church, and asking for forgiveness for the sins committed (Jam. 5:16; Acts 19:18; Lk. 17:3-4; 1 Jn. 1:9). The formal restoration of membership will then follow the normal church process for receiving members (See Above: Section IV: Candidacy and Reception).

## **Article VI: Church Officers**

### **Section I: General Statement**

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Col. 1:18). 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. Christ has ordained that local churches be led by elders and served by deacons. Besides the offices of elder and deacon, the Scriptures acknowledge no other offices that continue in the church today (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). This results in a church that is Christ-ruled, Elder-led, Deacon-served, and Congregationally-engaged.

### **Section II: General Prerequisites**

- A. All officers of [Church Plant] must be members in good standing 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 confessions 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. All officers must be men. 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 (Rom. 16:1-6; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11), the Bible prohibits them from holding either the office of deacon or elder (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7). Women, therefore, shall not be ordained to either of these offices in the church. It is also contrary to Scripture for any woman to exercise authority in a formal meeting of the whole church, either by leading in prayer, leading the musical worship, administering the ordinances, or ministering the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15).

### **Section III: Elders**

- A. Those who have been called and equipped by God to lead 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 (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11-12; Titus 1:5, 7).
- 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 (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9).
- 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 (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). 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 (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2; II Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17).
  - 3. The authority of the elders does not permit them to govern in isolation from the body or apart from the congregation's wisdom, awareness, and participation. The Scriptures make clear that matters

## DRAFT

such as corrective discipline and the recognition of officers are to be carried out in the life of the assembled church, with the congregation meaningfully engaged in the process (Acts 6:2–6; Acts 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4–5, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6). Likewise, other matters of significant importance, such as the reception and exclusion of church members, the full support and involuntary removal of officers, and major financial decisions, should be handled with clear communication, congregational input, and the common assent of the church. In all such matters, the elders bear the responsibility of providing faithful, definitive leadership, while seeking the unity, purity, and edification of the body of Christ.

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 (Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14). They must, however, order the house of God by the application of His Word (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3a; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Cor. 7:25-28; 35-40).
  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. Thus, each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and accountable to the church as a whole (Matt. 18:17; 23:9; 26:31; Gal. 2:11; 3 John 1,9-10).
  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 never undermine real parity among the elders (Acts 20:28; Gal. 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17).
  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 (Heb. 13:17).
- 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 (1 Tim. 5:17f).
  - G. If [Church Plant], through the providence of God, comes to have no elders, then 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 seeking a qualified man to pastor the church.

## Section IV: Meetings of the Elders

## DRAFT

The elders shall meet together regularly for prayer, the study of the Scriptures, mutual encouragement, shepherding oversight, and the government of the church. In all their deliberations, the elders shall seek to discern the will of Christ through the faithful application of the Scriptures, earnest prayer, wise counsel, and humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit. As under-shepherds of Christ, they are to labor together in humility, love, and mutual submission, recognizing that they share equal authority and responsibility in the oversight of the church.

- A. Ordinarily, such meetings should occur at least twice each month, though more frequent meetings should be held as the needs of the church require. Any elder may request a special meeting whenever matters arise requiring timely discussion, counsel, or action. Such special meetings must be requested at least 72 hours in advance.
- B. The ordinary manner of decision-making among the elders shall be by consensus.
  - 1. Consensus does not require complete uniformity of opinion on every matter, but rather a general unity of mind after each elder has been given full opportunity to speak, ask questions, raise concerns, and search the Scriptures together. When consensus has been prayerfully reached, every elder should willingly and publicly support and uphold the decision of the eldership for the peace, unity, and edification of the church.
  - 2. The elders should ordinarily refrain from making significant decisions whenever they believe additional prayer, study, discussion, or congregational counsel would better serve the peace, purity, or unity of the church.
  - 3. Recognizing the gravity of certain matters affecting the life of the church, this constitution expressly requires unanimous approval of the elders in those cases specifically identified herein. Such requirements go beyond consensus to promote careful deliberation, preserve unity among the shepherds of Christ's flock, and ensure broad confidence in decisions of particular significance.
- C. The ordinary business of the eldership should be conducted only when a majority of the elders are present and able to participate in the deliberations. In unusual circumstances, when a majority cannot reasonably be assembled, the elders may confer as circumstances permit, but any significant matter affecting the life or government of the church should ordinarily be deferred until the eldership is able to meet in its ordinary capacity, unless immediate action is necessary for the care or protection of the church.
- D. No individual elder shall ordinarily act independently in matters belonging to the collective oversight of the eldership, except where authority has been expressly delegated by the eldership or where circumstances require immediate pastoral action. In such cases, the elder shall report his actions to the other elders as soon as reasonably possible.
- E. The elders shall maintain appropriate records of their meetings and significant decisions in order to promote faithful stewardship, accountability, continuity of leadership, and the orderly government of the church.

## Section V: Deacons

- F. 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.

## DRAFT

- G. Deacons must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and under the leadership of the elders. Deacons shall meet regularly with the elders to facilitate communication with them and to facilitate the efficient functioning of the diaconate.
- H. The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall set apart according to its need men who evidence the scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).
- I. The standard term of service for a deacon shall be two years. After two years, the deacon may, in good conscience, step down from his office. This term may be renewed for continuous further increments of two years, provided the man still desires the office and meets the scriptural requirements (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

### **Section VI: Appointment of Officers**

The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, He has ordained that they be formally recognized by the common assent of the particular church they serve. Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (1 Tim. 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (1 Tim. 5:22). Therefore, each officer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership in particular. The Lord's appointment of an individual to either of these offices is recognized by means of that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for the particular office, and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never 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.

#### **Procedure of Appointment:**

The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church shall be carried out with reverence, wisdom, and careful submission to the Scriptures. Since Christ Himself gives shepherds and servants to His church (Eph. 4:11; Acts 20:28), the church does not create officers by mere human decision, but seeks to recognize and set apart those whom the Lord has already raised up, gifted, and qualified for such service.

Men are to be recognized for office only upon the approval of the elders and with the common assent of the members. The method of recognizing officers in [Church Plant] shall ordinarily proceed according to the following steps:

#### **A. Initial Elder Consideration**

1. The members of the church are encouraged to communicate their observations to the elders regarding men whom the Lord may be gifting and qualifying for office within the church. Since Christ distributes gifts to His body for its edification (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11), and since wisdom is often found in the multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14), the elders shall give serious consideration to the counsel of the congregation.
2. Likewise, if a man believes the Lord has given him the desire for the work of the ministry, and especially for the office of elder, he may present himself to the elders for consideration (1 Tim. 3:1).
3. The elders shall then carefully examine the man's life, doctrine, character, and qualifications according to the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9), seeking to determine with sobriety and prayer whether the Lord has indeed raised him up for such service.

## DRAFT

4. This process may require multiple meetings and a significant period of observation or further discipleship. Because of the importance of Christ's church and the seriousness of the office, no man should be hastily recognized for leadership (1 Tim. 5:22).

### B. Church Evaluation and Assent

1. When the elders are satisfied that a man appears qualified for office, he shall be formally presented to the church for evaluation and input.
2. This process shall include the following:
  - i. A formal announcement to the church of the elders' current intention to recognize the nominee for office.
  - ii. A clear presentation of the office for which he is being considered and the scriptural qualifications pertaining to that office.
  - iii. The nominee's testimony, doctrinal convictions, and manner of life will be made available to the members of the church.
  - iv. An allowance of a period of not less than four weeks for the members to evaluate the nominee, and voice either recommendations or concerns to the pastors regarding the office-bearing qualifications of the man.
  - v. During this time, the church is encouraged to consider the matter earnestly, with prayer, humility, and love for both Christ's church and the nominee. Ideally, members would show hospitality to the nominee during this time, both to promote ongoing fellowship and to ensure that any recommendations or concerns are valid. However, it is not required for each individual member to do so.
3. The goal of this period is not mere procedural formality, but the cultivation of broad confidence, joyful affirmation, and practical unity within the body concerning the man being recognized for office.

### C. Elder Approval and Recognition

1. After sufficient time has been allowed for the church to evaluate the nominee, he shall be approved or declined by the elders, taking due consideration of the input of the congregation, the unity of the church, and the seriousness of the office.
2. Because the responsibility of oversight rests with the elders, final recognition of officers belongs to them under Christ. The elders shall therefore proceed with wisdom, transparency, and pastoral care, not acting in isolation from the church, but seeking the peace, purity, and edification of the body.
3. A unanimous decision among the elders shall be required for the recognition of an elder or deacon.

### D. Ordination and Installation

1. If the nominee is approved for office, he shall be publicly ordained and installed during a worship service by the laying on of the hands of the elders (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6).
2. This joyous act shall be accompanied by prayer and thanksgiving to God (Acts 13:1-3), acknowledging both the Lord's calling and the church's recognition of His work.
3. The laying on of the hands of the elders shall signify their approval, fellowship, and public affirmation of the man being set apart for service in Christ's church.

## Section VII: Review of Officers and Resignation

- A. Officers may hold office as long as they meet the biblical qualifications for their office.

## DRAFT

- a. The standard required term of service for a deacon shall be two years. After two years, the deacon may, in good conscience, step down from his office. This term may be renewed for continuous further increments of two years, provided the man still desires the office and meets the scriptural requirements (1 Tim. 3:8-13).
- b. There shall be no standard term of service for an elder. He should remain an elder for as long as the man still desires the office and meets the scriptural requirements (1 Tim. 3:1-7).
- B. A meeting to review the qualifications of an officer may be called by a simple majority of the elders, or a simple majority of the other elders in the case of an elder. The members of the church may also request such a meeting. This request must be made in writing, must state the name of the officer requested to be reviewed, must avoid slander, must be accompanied by the signatures of one-fourth of the total membership of the church, and must be presented to the elders, who shall, in a timely and constitutional way, call such a meeting.
- C. Any meeting for the review of an officer shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. The scriptural qualifications must form the basis for the congregational discussion and the final decision of the elders. The officer's qualifications must be openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the officer. The officer under discussion must be permitted to defend himself. The church should seek unanimity of mind concerning the matter, but if such unanimity is not realized, the responsibility of oversight rests with the elders, as final recognition of officers belongs to them under Christ. The elders shall therefore proceed with wisdom, taking into account all the available input, and determine if the officer shall be confirmed or removed from his office. A unanimous decision among the elders, or of the other elders in the case of an elder, shall be required for the removal of an officer.
- D. An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion. This resignation shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the church and, in a timely fashion, announced to the church.

### Article VII: Church Property

All property of this church shall be held for the use and benefit of the ministry of Christ through this local body. Such property is set apart for the worship of God, the edification of His people, and every lawful and necessary use for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ through the life and ministry of this church. The stewardship and oversight of the church's property and temporal affairs shall be exercised under the leadership of the elders, with the assistance of the deacons where appropriate. In matters of significant financial consequence or major decisions regarding the use, acquisition, or disposition of church property, the elders shall provide clear communication to the congregation and seek its counsel, awareness, and broad affirmation, pursuing unity and wise stewardship in all things. 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.

### Article VIII: Church Finances

#### Section I: General Statement

The work of this church is financially dependent upon the voluntary gifts of God's people. All funds entrusted to the church are to be used for the worship of God, the edification of His people, and the advancement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The stewardship and oversight of the church's financial resources shall be exercised under the leadership of the elders, with the assistance of the deacons where appropriate. In all such matters, the officers shall act with integrity, transparency, and wise stewardship before the Lord.

## **Section II: Budget Process**

The fiscal year of the church shall begin January first and end December thirty-first.

- A. Prior to the beginning of each fiscal year, the elders, with the assistance of the deacons, shall prepare an estimated budget outlining the anticipated needs and proposed expenditures for the various ministries of the church.
- B. The proposed budget shall be distributed to the members of the church not less than six weeks prior to the December member meeting, together with a clear explanation of its components.
- C. Members shall be given an allowance of a period of not less than four weeks to review the proposed budget and to bring any questions, recommendations, or concerns to the elders.
- D. Following this period of review, the elders shall take two weeks to further consider the input received and make any appropriate revisions.
- E. The finalized budget shall then be presented at the December congregational meeting and shall be adopted by the elders as the general framework for the fiscal year of the church.

## **Section III: Budget Oversight and Adjustments**

Because the annual budget serves as a projected framework for the financial stewardship of the church, it is understood that adjustments may be necessary throughout the fiscal year. Smaller changes and routine variations are to be expected and should not require formal presentation to the congregation in every instance. The Scriptures commend the entrusting of financial stewardship to faithful men (2 Kings 12:15; 22:7). Accordingly, the elders, in consultation with the deacons, shall regularly review the financial condition, expenditures, and needs of the church, and may approve adjustments that do not exceed five percent of the total approved budget, exercising wisdom, integrity, and accountability before the Lord.

If expenditures are reasonably anticipated to exceed the approved budgeted operating expenses by more than 5% of the total approved budget, the elders shall present the matter to the members of the church with a clear explanation of the need. A reasonable period shall be allowed for members to offer questions, counsel, or concerns. After due consideration of such input, the elders shall make a final determination, seeking to act with unity, prudence, and faithfulness in the stewardship entrusted to them.

## **Article IX: Congregational Meetings**

### **Section I: Biannual Member Meetings**

[Church Plant] shall have two member meetings each year to give pastoral and financial reports to the congregation, and to otherwise conduct the business of the church. The first appointed member meeting shall be held in June or July of each year. The second appointed member meeting shall be held in December of each year.

### **Section II: Occasional Member Meetings**

Additional member meetings may be called by the elders as they deem necessary for the life and health of the church. Members of [Church Plant] may also request that a meeting be called by submitting a written request to the elders, stating the reason for the meeting and signed by not less than one-fourth of the members in good standing. The elders shall give due consideration to such requests and, if they judge it to be wise and beneficial for the church, shall call a meeting and provide appropriate notice to the congregation. These additional member

## DRAFT

meetings shall ordinarily be announced at regular services for at least two successive Lord's Days prior to the meeting, so that the members may be adequately informed and prepared.

The elders may, at any time and without prior notice, call for an informational meeting of the church for the purpose of communication, instruction, or clarification. Such meetings shall not be used to make formal decisions, but rather to inform and edify the congregation.

### **Section III: Clerk**

The elders shall appoint a clerk from among the members of the church. The clerk shall be responsible for maintaining an accurate and orderly record of the proceedings and actions of the church, including the preservation of relevant documents and communications. Such records shall be maintained with care and integrity and shall be available to the elders and, as appropriate, to the members of the church. The clerk shall serve under the oversight of the elders, who retain the authority to appoint or replace the clerk as they deem wise.

### **Article X: Associations**

[Church Plant] is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body. Nevertheless, it 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, the elders may determine that this church should join itself to an association or associations of churches. Before entering such an affiliation, the elders shall communicate the matter clearly to the members of the church and allow opportunity for questions, counsel, and thoughtful input from the body. Withdrawal from associations may be effected in the same manner.

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 associated matters.

### **Article XI: Miscellaneous**

#### **Section I: Corporate Organization**

Should the church be organized as a nonprofit corporation or other legal entity, the elders may appoint such corporate officers as are required by applicable civil law. Such offices exist solely for the orderly administration of the church's legal and temporal affairs and shall not constitute biblical offices of the church or confer spiritual authority beyond that delegated by the elders. The same individual may hold more than one corporate office where permitted by law.

### **Article XII: Constitutional Authority**

#### **Section I: 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. Nevertheless, we as members of this church

## DRAFT

have solemnly committed ourselves to follow this constitution in ordering the life of this church. Its provisions must be followed until it is amended in the constitutionally mandated fashion.

### **Section II: 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 indeed requires an amendment to the constitution, they shall communicate the matter to the members of the church in a timely manner and proceed according to the amendment process set forth below.

### **Section III: Amendments**

All proposed amendments to this constitution shall be distributed in written form to the members of the church together with their scriptural basis and explanation.

An allowance of a period of not less than four weeks shall be given for the members to evaluate the proposed amendment and to bring any questions, counsel, or concerns to the elders.

After due consideration of such input, the elders may amend the constitution as they judge necessary for the faithful ordering of the church according to the Scriptures.

The elders shall not amend the constitution hastily or without careful biblical consideration, but shall seek in all such matters to preserve the peace, purity, unity, and faithful order of Christ's church.