

OUR CHURCH CONSTITUTION

We the members of Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church establish the following articles to which we voluntarily and solemnly submit ourselves.

Article I

Name

The name of this church is Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church.

Article II

Purpose

This church's purpose is to glorify God by being "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:15). To this end, we commit to walk together so as to be and do everything Christ wills for a local church. We will defend the true faith, maintain God's worship, proclaim God's law and gospel, evangelize the lost, edify God's people, and nurture fellowship with one another as members of Christ's body.

Article III

Articles of Faith

The Bible is our only inerrant and infallible authority for determining questions of faith and practice. We regard, however, the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 as an excellent, though uninspired, summary of the chief doctrines of God's Word. We adopt this Confession as expressing those things believed among us.

Article IV

Membership

A. Requirements for Membership

Any person exhibiting adult maturity¹ shall be eligible for membership who, in the judgment of the elders², has a credible profession of repentance toward God and faith in Christ³, manifests a life transformed by the power of Christ⁴, has been baptized as a believer⁵, expresses substantial agreement with the Confession and Constitution of this church⁶, intends to give wholehearted support to its ministry and submit to its government and discipline⁷, and is not under the biblically warranted corrective discipline of a church.⁸

¹Acts 5:14; 8:3,12

²Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 3:5; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; Heb. 13:17

³Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:14; 8:12; 16:30-34; 20:21

⁴1 Cor. 6:11; 1 Thess. 1:2-10

⁵Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:30-34; 18:8

⁶1 Cor. 1:10; 14:40; Rom. 15:5-6; Eph. 4:3-6

⁷Acts 2:42; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 1:10; 12:25-27; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 13:17

⁸Matt. 18:17-18; Rom. 16:17-19; 2 Thess. 3:6

B. Reception into Membership

A person desiring membership should request a membership interview with the elders. The purpose of this interview is to determine if the applicant meets the membership requirements as set out in Art. IV.A. If the applicant has been a member of another church, investigation may be made of their standing in that church and reason for leaving. If a former church raises an objection, the applicant may be denied membership. If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets membership requirements, they shall announce the applicant's candidacy for membership for at least three Lord's Days. During this time objections or questions may be raised privately with the elders. If in the elders' judgment no valid objection exists, the church will receive the applicant into membership at the next scheduled celebration of the Lord's Supper. At that time the applicant will be asked the following questions:

- Do you acknowledge that you are a sinner, justly deserving God's wrath, and without hope apart from his sovereign mercy?
- Do you believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is God's Son and the only Savior of sinners, and do you rest on his death and righteousness alone for your salvation?
- Do you promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will live a life worthy of a follower of Christ?
- Do you submit yourself to the Constitution of this church?
- Do you promise to faithfully support this church in its worship and work and submit to its government to the best of your ability?

After the candidate has answered these questions, the church will have opportunity to affirm its approval of the candidate's membership by the corporate "Amen."

C. Termination of Membership

1. Types of Termination

- a. By Death. When a member dies, his name will be removed from membership.
- b. By Transfer. When requested, the elders may give a member in good standing a letter of commendation to another church. No letter will be given to a member under corrective discipline. The elders also may refuse a letter of commendation to any church which in their judgment is disloyal to the Christian faith or does not take godly care of its members.
- c. By Resignation. As a rule, members may resign from membership. Members should do so in an orderly way by first consulting with the elders. A resignation offered by a member guilty of

sin which warrants corrective discipline is invalid, and the church shall proceed with appropriate disciplinary action. When the elders judge that the church has no further disciplinary business with the member, the resignation (if not withdrawn) will then be accepted.

- d. By Dismission. If without good cause a member ceases to carry out the responsibilities of membership (Art. IV.E.), he may be dismissed. In such cases the elders will try to resolve the difficulty by counsel and admonition; however, if this fails, the elders may recommend to the church that the person be dismissed from membership. The church will be informed of the grounds for the recommended dismission. Members will have opportunity to privately raise concerns with the elders. After considering such concerns, the elders may call for a vote of the church in a properly called business meeting (Art. IX). To be valid, dismission of a member must be approved by two thirds of the members present and voting.
- e. By Excommunication. The church must remove from its membership anyone who teaches or insists on holding heretical doctrine, who impenitently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with a Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity, peace, or purity of the church. The procedure to be followed in such cases is set out in Article V.

2. Implications of Termination

Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church acknowledges its duty to promote the purity, peace, edification, and unity of all true churches. Fulfilling this duty sometimes requires forthright communication between churches. Moreover, we have a moral duty to act with integrity and to maintain our church's testimony before the civil authorities and before the unbelieving. At their discretion, the elders may disclose to other churches, to the civil authorities, or to other concerned parties the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated.⁹

Termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, spread false teachings or slander, or engage in any other behavior which threatens the peace and unity of this or other churches. Accordingly, if it is established that a former member is behaving in a divisive or disorderly way, the elders may issue whatever warnings they judge appropriate.¹⁰

⁹1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:10; 1 John 2:18-19

¹⁰Acts 15:24; Rom. 16:17-20

D. Privileges of Membership

1. Right to the pastoral oversight and care of the elders of the church
2. Legitimate expectation of intimate fellowship with the members of the church
3. Participation in the Lord's Supper
4. Attendance at, participation in, and voting during business meetings
5. Participation in ministries under the church's oversight

E. Responsibilities of Membership

1. Godly Christian Life

Members are expected to walk worthily of the Lord¹¹, that His name and Word not be blasphemed¹² but rather His excellencies be displayed through us¹³, and that the church's good name not be

damaged but rather enhanced.¹⁴ Therefore every member is expected to practice and cultivate godliness in all areas of life, including the following:

¹¹*Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; Philip. 1:27; 1 Thess. 2:12*

¹²*Rom. 2:24; 1 Tim. 6:1; Tit. 2:5*

¹³*1 Pet. 2:9*

¹⁴*1 Cor. 5:1-2; 1 Thess. 1:8-10; 2 Thess. 1:4*

a. Members are expected to walk with the Lord, making regular use of the private means of grace, such as daily private prayer¹⁵, daily reading and meditating on God's Word¹⁶, keeping a good conscience¹⁷, periodic self-examination prayerfully conducted by the standard of God's Word¹⁸, and careful and spiritual observance of the Lord's Day Sabbath.¹⁹

¹⁵*Matt. 6:6-13; Psalms 55:17; 88:9; 145:1-2; Daniel 6:10*

¹⁶*Psalms 1:2; 119:11,97; Acts 17:11*

¹⁷*Acts 24:15-16; 1 Tim. 1:18-19*

¹⁸*Psalms 139:23-24; 2 Cor. 13:5; 2 Pet. 1:5-11; 1 John 5:13*

¹⁹*Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 58:13-14; Mark 2:27; Hebrews 4:9*

b. Members are expected to obey the Bible's teachings with respect to family life and government. As the God-appointed head of the family, the husband must rule his household with gentleness, love, wisdom, and firmness. The wife must be subject to her husband in all things according to the rule of Scripture.²⁰ Parents must nurture their children in the chastening and admonition of the Lord-setting a godly example before them, leading them in family worship, instructing them in the Scriptures, praying for them, and wisely, lovingly and firmly disciplining them.²¹ Members must also honor their parents.²²

²⁰*Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Pet. 3:1-12*

²¹*Eph. 6:1-4; Col. 3:20-21; Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 6:7-8; Proverbs 2:1; 3:1; 4:1,10,20; 5:1; 6:20; 13:24; 22:15; 29:15; Hebrews 12:7*

²²*Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16*

c. Members are expected to pray and labor, according to God-given ability and opportunity, for the extension of God's kingdom, seeking to recognize and seize opportunities to witness to Christ by consistent Christian conduct and by verbal testimony.²³

²³*Ezekiel 33:11; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Romans 1:16; 10:1; Philip. 2:15-16; 1 Pet. 3:15*

d. Members are expected to obey all the moral precepts established in God's Word.²⁴ If God has not forbidden a practice in His Word, a Christian has liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God, by a determination to glorify Him in all things, by a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren, by a compassion for the lost, and by a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul.²⁵

²⁴*Rom. 6:12-13,18; 7:25; 2 Cor. 7:1; Eph. 4:17-24; Col. 3:5-10; 1 Thess. 4:1-3; 1 Pet. 4:1-2*

²⁵*Rom. 13:12-14; 14:1-15:3; 1 Cor. 8-9; 10:31*

God never intended that Christian liberty become an excuse and covering for worldliness.²⁶ To the contrary, we are freed from sin's bondage that we may be a people distinct from the world and set apart unto God.²⁷ Therefore, we must not love the world, but rather refrain from wicked attitudes and deeds and resist the wicked influences of a godless society.²⁸ Members also are expected to refrain from entangling relationships with the ungodly, such as intimate companionship with them, pursuing romantic interests in them, and contracting marriages with them.²⁹

²⁶*Gal. 5:13; 1 Pet. 2:16*

²⁷*Lev. 18; Tit. 2:11-14; 1 Pet. 1:14-16*

²⁸*Psa. 139:19-22; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:17-24; 5:3-17; Tit. 2:12; Js. 1:27; 4:4; 1 Pet. 4:1-4; 1 John 2:15-17*

²⁹*Judg. 16:4; 1 Kings 11:1-4; 1 Cor. 7:39; 15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14-18*

e. Members are expected to submit to all in authority over them, whether in the home, church, state, or workplace.³⁰

³⁰*Eph. 5:22; 6:1; Heb. 13:17; Rom. 13:1; Eph. 6:5*

2. Godly Churchmanship

a. Attendance at public worship is a duty and privilege. For this reason, members are expected consistently to attend the church's regular meetings unless providentially hindered.³¹ Irregular attendance may indicate a serious lack of commitment to Christ and this church. The church's regular meetings are (1) the meetings of the Lord's Day, (2) the corporate prayer meeting, and (3) church business meetings. We recognize that in some cases providential hindrances may continue for an extended period. If a member anticipates being absent from a regular meeting for an extended period, he should discuss this with the elders.

³¹*Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24-25*

b. Members are expected to maintain the doctrinal purity and unity of the congregation.³² Therefore, members are encouraged to read the Confession and Constitution of the church at least once a year in order to maintain sensitivity to our commonly held standards of doctrine and practice. Should a member come to hold a substantial point of disagreement with the Confession or Constitution of the church, he is required to notify the elders of this fact.

³²*1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:3-6; Jude 3*

c. Since the Bible teaches that Christians should support the work of the Lord financially by systematic and proportionate giving made through the local church, members are expected to conform to this rule of Scripture. The biblical model of basic giving is the tithe (ten percent of one's income), to which gifts and offerings should be added according to one's ability and willingness of heart.³³

³³*Prov. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:8-10; 1 Cor. 9:14; 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18*

d. The church is a body with many members, each endowed by the Spirit with gifts to be used for the good of the body. Each member should have a concern for the welfare of the body and actively seek opportunities for service. Members should also seek to cultivate acquaintance with one another, maintain mutual transparency so as to better pray for, love, comfort, and encourage one another, and help one another materially as necessity may require. Moreover, members should discreetly confess their sins to one another, faithfully exhort one another, refrain from all backbiting and gossip, and keep in strict confidence all matters which the elders determine are private concerns of the church.³⁴

³⁴*Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-31; Eph. 4:25; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25; Gal. 6:10; James 2:15-16; 5:16; 1 John 3:16-18; 1 Thess. 5:14-15; Psa. 15:3; Prov. 11:13; 16:28; 26:18-23*

e. Members are expected to support and submit to the elders of the church. Supporting God's servants includes praying for them and their labors, cultivating personal acquaintance with them, loving them, esteeming them highly for their work's sake, standing by them in their afflictions and in all their good causes, assisting them, and defending rather than prejudicing or damaging their good name. Submitting to God's servants includes imitating their faith, graces, and godly practices as they also imitate Christ, receiving their teaching with readiness of mind and teachableness of spirit, humbly heeding their scriptural warnings as those appointed to watch for our souls, seeking and carefully considering their counsel as those counted faithful by the Lord, and abiding by their legitimate decisions (see Art. VII.C.2) without acting or speaking divisively even when differing with their judgment.³⁵

³⁵*Prov. 19:20; Acts 17:11; 1 Cor. 10:10; 11:1; Eph. 6:18-20; Philip. 2:14; 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13,25; 1 Tim. 5:19; 2 Tim. 1:15-18; Heb. 13,7,17,18; 1 Pet. 5:3*

Article V

Church Discipline

A. Corrective Discipline

1. General Statement

a. Corrective discipline may be necessary when a member is guilty of heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral, or scandalous conduct. Whenever possible, before more drastic steps are taken, an effort will be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition.³⁶ The principles found in Matt. 18:15-16, Rom. 16:17-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim. 5:19-20, and Tit. 3:10 must be carefully followed and appropriately applied to each case of corrective discipline. In some cases public reproof and admonition and public repentance may be warranted. In some cases, excommunication (removal from membership) may be necessary. Members must submit to and enforce as appropriate the church's decision in acts of corrective discipline.

³⁶*Gal. 6:1*

b. Since the church is a spiritual institution, the actions taken by the church in corrective discipline are also spiritual. They include (where appropriate) public reproof, social avoidance and withdrawal of distinctive Christian fellowship, suspension from the Lord's Supper and other member privileges, and removal from membership. These actions are designed to promote repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame. 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 reported to the civil authorities and forfeits the right to pastoral confidentiality.

c. The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church, and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender.

2. Public Reproof and Suspension

Public reproof and suspension are means by which the church calls an impenitent member to repentance for sin too blatant to be dealt with in an exclusively private manner, or deals with

serious sin even where there may have been hopeful signs of repentance. The elders shall recommend such action to the church whenever in their judgment misconduct, patterns of sin, or doctrinal error pose a significant threat to the holiness, unity, or testimony of the church, to the spiritual health of the offending member, or to the welfare of the member's family. In all such cases, however, the offending person is still regarded as a Christian and member of the church. Therefore, in accord with the procedures outlined below for each major category of offense, at a business meeting of the church the elders will recommend that the offending member be reprovved and suspended, giving the grounds for this recommendation. This action must be approved by two-thirds of the members present and voting. In order to maintain a climate of holiness and peace, the elders have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension which will bar a member from not more than one Lord's table while they deliberate the most prudent course of action. Those who humbly receive this discipline, confess their sin, and manifest a transformed life shall afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance. If reproof is not heeded, further discipline may be imposed.³⁷

³⁷*Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 7:7-11*

A suspended member may not partake of the Lord's Table, vote during business meetings, or participate in ministries under the church's oversight. In some cases, suspension may also result in the interruption of intimate fellowship with the members of the church.³⁸

³⁸*2 Thess. 3:6-15*

The major categories of sin warranting reproof and suspension are:

a. A stubborn private offender (Matt. 18:15-17). When a private offense remains unresolved even after the method prescribed in Matthew 18 has been followed, it is considered an aggravated offense. The brethren involved shall bring the matter to the elders. If they judge the matter to be serious and cannot persuade the offender to repent, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the offender be publicly reprovved and suspended. If, after a period of suspension, he remains unrepentant, excommunication shall be enacted according to Article V.A.3.

b. Holding to heretical doctrine (Tit. 3:10; cf., 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; 1 John 2:20-24). When a member comes to hold serious doctrinal error contrary to Scripture and our Confession of Faith, he may be reprovved and suspended as an heretical man. Each member is responsible to preserve the unity of the church in her essential Christian doctrines; therefore, no member should conceal heresy should it arise, but rather reprove it and disclose it to the elders.³⁹ The elders will confront and admonish the offender. If he persists in such heretical beliefs, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that he be publicly reprovved and suspended. If, after a period of suspension, the offender remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to Article V.A.3.

³⁹*1 Cor. 1:10-11*

c. Divisive teachings or behavior (Rom. 16:17-20; Tit. 3:10). When a member propagates serious doctrinal error contrary to Scripture and our Confession of Faith, or tries to sow discord among the members, he may be reprovved and suspended as a factious man. Each member is responsible to preserve the unity of the Spirit; therefore no member should conceal flagrantly divisive behavior, but rather reprove it and disclose it to the elders.⁴⁰ The elders will confront and admonish the offender. If he persists in such behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and

recommend that he be publicly reprovved and suspended. If, after a period of suspension, the offender remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to Article V.A.3.

⁴⁰1 Cor. 1:10-11

d. Disorderly behavior (2 Thess. 3:6-15; cf., 1 Thess. 5:14). When a member persists in conduct which flagrantly disregards the order which God has established for His creation, or for the home, church, workplace, or state-so that he behaves in an unruly way contrary to God's appointment, he may be publicly reprovved and suspended as a disorderly or unruly man. When the elders learn that a member is behaving disorderly, they will confront and admonish him. If the offender persists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that he be publicly reprovved and suspended. If, after the period of suspension, the offender remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to Article V.A.3.

Scandalous sin (1 Cor. 5:1-13). When a member sins (in such a way as may disgrace the name of Christ) in any of the things which God's moral law commands or forbids, he may be publicly reprovved and suspended. If he shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the elders, it would be wrong to excommunicate him, but it may still be prudent to publicly reprove and suspend him for a time so that he may clearly manifest repentance, so that reproach not be brought on the name of Christ and the testimony of the church, so that others may not be emboldened to sin, and so that the offender not fail to test his own soul and realize the gravity of his offense. If fruits worthy of repentance are not forthcoming, the elders later shall recommend to the church that the offender be excommunicated according to Article V.A.3.

e. Contempt of church discipline. If a member is suspected of sin warranting corrective discipline, yet to avoid discipline absents himself from the church's meetings, or refuses to meet with the elders so that the matter may be investigated, the member may be publicly reprovved and suspended. The elders later may recommend to the church that the member be excommunicated according to Article V.A.3.

f. Failure to fulfill the responsibilities of membership may lead to temporary suspension prior to dismissal.

3. Excommunication

a. Excommunication involves removing a person from membership in the church and denying to them the privileges of membership. It requires the withdrawal of distinctively Christian fellowship and the practice of social avoidance. Excommunication does not exempt family members from carrying out their biblical duties to the excommunicated person, nor does it preclude continued attendance at the church's meetings for worship.

b. Some sins (ethical or doctrinal) are so heinous that the offender may be immediately excommunicated. This measure is to be used when both aggravated lawlessness is discovered and there is no hopeful sign of repentance. This measure is designed to cure the offender of his lethal attachment to his sin and to promote his sincere and enduring repentance. The elders, therefore, having made an unsuccessful effort to bring the offender to repentance, shall report the same to the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated.

c. Suspended members shall be excommunicated if they remain impenitent.

d. All acts of excommunication must be executed by the church. To be valid, an act of excommunication must be approved by two thirds of the members present and voting at a business meeting called for this purpose.

B. Protective Discipline

While the church has no authority to exercise discipline over non-members, it does have the right and responsibility to protect its members from those who would disrupt its peace or the purity of its life and doctrine. When such persons trouble the church, the elders shall name them, identify their errors, and warn the members not to associate with them.⁴¹

⁴¹2 Tim. 1:15; 4:14-15; Tit. 1:10-16

C. Restoration

Since one purpose of church discipline is to restore a fallen member, the church shall forgive and restore to full membership a suspended or excommunicated member who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance.⁴² This shall be done in a business meeting of the church by no less than two thirds of the members present and voting.

⁴²2 Cor. 2:1-11

Article VI

The Lord's Supper

In order to maintain the purity of this ordinance, the policy of this church is that only believers who are members in good standing of a true church (i.e., a church holding to the basic tenets of evangelical Christianity) are permitted to partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper. If a visitor wishes to partake of more than one Lord's Supper, he must consult with the elders.

Church membership is a duty of every Christian (except in extraordinary cases). The New Testament does not envision Christ's disciples living in any other way than joined together in local congregations, in which they are formally committed to the body and under the oversight of its elders. Christians who are able to be members of a true church, but who will not do so, are walking in a disorderly way and are not eligible to partake of the Lord's Table. In this policy we have the same standard as for our members, should they walk in a disorderly way (cf., Article V.A.2.c).

Article VII

Officers

A. General Statement

Christ alone is head of His church; yet He has ordained that His church be governed through officers whom He appoints, and to whom He gives gifts and graces for their work. There are two kinds of church officers – elders and deacons. The church's duty is to seek to discover those to whom Christ has imparted the graces and gifts necessary for office. After formally recognizing them

by the method described in Art. VII.E., the church is to set them apart publicly, then submit to their authority and support their ministries.

B. General Prerequisites

1. All officers of this church must be males, members of Emmanuel Reformed Baptist Church, meet the scriptural qualifications for their office, and be able to fulfill their official duties.⁴³

⁴³1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9; Acts 6:3

2. Any man set apart to church office must agree with our Confession of Faith and this Constitution. If he holds views differing from these documents at any point, he must reveal this to the elders prior to his installation in office. The elders will determine if any of these points of difference are substantial enough to disqualify the candidate from church office. If a church officer changes his views on matters addressed in our Confession of Faith or this Constitution, he must in an orderly way make this known to the elders immediately.

3. We acknowledge the gifts that God has given women and the valuable service that they give to the church. We recognize their valid role in the formal instruction of children and other women, in the informal instruction of men, and in service to the church. Nevertheless, the Bible prohibits women from holding the office of deacon or elder, and from teaching or having authority over a man in any formal meeting of the church.⁴⁴

⁴⁴1 Tim. 2:12

C. Elders

1. Those whom Christ calls to rule in the church are called elders, pastors, or overseers (interchangeable names designating the same office).

2. The authority of elders is a divinely ordained and delegated authority which nevertheless has important limitations.⁴⁵

⁴⁵Heb. 13:17

a. The Scriptures are the infallible and unchanging rule of the church's faith and practice, to which elders are bound in discharging their office. Insofar as the elders' instruction accords with the Scriptures, that instruction has the authority of Christ himself. When the Bible gives clear direction to the church on any issue, its teaching is always to be obeyed. Moreover, when elders require obedience to their directives and decisions, they must seek to gain the consciences of God's people through the ministry of the Word. In some cases, when no clear regulative word is given in Scripture, elders must exercise their authority subject to the general principles of Scripture and to the light of nature and Christian prudence.

b. The elders' authority is limited to the sphere of the church. They may not usurp the lawful authority of others (e.g., husbands, parents, civil rulers, employers), impose corrective actions beyond those of biblical church discipline, or command God's people in matters not specified in Scripture.

c. Elders are authorized and responsible to give comprehensive oversight to the church, including preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God, watching for the welfare of the members' souls, and directing the church in all its tasks. Elders, however, must exercise their authority with sensitivity to God's people and as servants and examples to them. Therefore, in major endeavors the elders shall seek the congregation's support and carefully consider its input when doing so will not require them sinfully to relinquish their God-given responsibilities or authority. Elders may not impose officers on the church nor may they unilaterally discipline any member (except under the provision of Art. V.A.2). Nevertheless, the elders have a lawful role in giving leadership to the church in making such decisions.

d. While elders are shepherds over the flock, they are also members of the flock and are entitled to the same privileges, have the same duties, and are subject to the same discipline as other members.

e. The authority of every elder is the same, so that every elder has equal rule in the church. Though elders will possess differing gifts and perform differing functions in the church, this diversity of gift and function does not negate real parity among them.

3. Though a plurality of elders is the biblical norm, the Bible does not specify the number of elders each church shall have, nor dictate the length of an elder's term of office. Elders may continue in office as long as they are biblically qualified and able to fulfill their duties, and as long as they retain the congregation's confidence as expressed in the procedure for the review of officers (Art. VII.F.).

4. Under ordinary circumstances, elders will keep in strict confidence matters revealed to them in the course of counseling. If, however, a member confesses sin which warrants church discipline, the elders (in order to discharge their duty to Christ and the church) may divulge the matter to the church. Likewise, if a member confesses sin which involves violation of criminal law, the elders may report the violation to the civil authorities. Under the terms of this paragraph, members must not expect absolute confidentiality in such cases.

D. Deacons

Christ has established the office of deacon as an aid to God's people in general and to the elders in particular. The office of deacon is a serving rather than ruling office.

The duty of deacons is to administer the church's business affairs and benevolent concerns so that the elders may devote themselves without distraction to the biblical priorities of their office.

Deacons must fulfill their duties in cooperation with and under the oversight of the elders.

The Bible does not specify the number of deacons each church shall have, nor dictate the length of a deacon's term of office. Deacons may continue in office as long as they are biblically qualified and able to fulfill their duties, and as long as they retain the congregation's confidence as expressed in the procedure for the review of officers (Art. VII.F.).

E. Appointment of Officers

1. General Statement

The appointment of officers is the prerogative of Christ alone; however, He has ordained that the church be active in recognizing those whom He is appointing. The Lord's appointment of a man to church office is recognized by his possessing the graces and gifts required by Scripture and by his and the church's conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The proper recognition of officers is of such importance that it should be done only after prayerful waiting on God and a frank evaluation of the qualifications and aspirations of those being considered. Each member has a duty to participate in this process.

2. Procedure of Appointment

a. Nominations to office may be made by either the elders or the church. At the annual church business meeting (or at a special business meeting called according to the terms of Art. IX.B) an advisory ballot will be taken, on which members may indicate those whom they believe should be considered for office. Those nominated by at least one-half of the total membership shall be considered by a nominating committee consisting of the elders and deacons. After earnest prayer and careful consideration, this committee shall place in nomination those men that it deems should stand for office. After reporting to the congregation, this committee will automatically be dissolved. At any time the elders may nominate men to office and call a special business meeting for their consideration.

b. Any meeting for the election of officers must be announced on four Lord's Days prior to its being held. At this meeting, a unanimous vote is desirable; however, if unanimity is not realized, no less than three-fourths of the ballots cast is required for election.

At least four weeks prior to this meeting, the elders will remind the congregation of the scriptural qualifications for church office.

Any member concerned about a nominee's qualifications must speak to the nominee privately before the election meeting is held. If the matter is not resolved privately, the concerned member must inform the church's officers (acting as a board of review)⁴⁶ and present factual warrant of his concern.

⁴⁶In such cases the officer under review may be present but shall not be a member of the board of review.

If a majority of the board of review judges that the concern has no basis in fact or does not constitute a biblical disqualification, the nomination shall stand.

If a majority of the board of review judges that the concern has a basis in fact and is of such gravity as to constitute a biblical disqualification, the nomination will be withdrawn. If the nomination originated with the congregation under the terms of Art. VII.E.2.a, and if the nominee so desires, the congregation will be notified of the specific reason. Otherwise, the congregation will be told that the nomination is being withdrawn "for cause." The expression "for cause" should not be taken to mean that the nominee is guilty of sin. It may simply reflect a desire to maintain the nominee's legitimate privacy. If further information becomes available, the nomination will be reviewed further by the

church's officers. If their judgment is changed, this will be reported to the congregation and the nomination will stand.

At meetings called pertaining to the election of an officer, discussion will be limited to positive comments concerning the nominee and to concerns referred to the congregation under the terms of the due process described above. At such meetings, anyone who tries to bring an accusation against a nominee without such due process will be publicly rebuked as disorderly.

c. Officers will be installed by the laying on of the hands of the elders at a regular worship service.

F. Review of Officers

1. The church shall reconfirm (or withdraw) its confidence in the biblical qualifications of each officer four years after his ordination and every fourth year thereafter. Ordinarily this will take place at the annual church business meeting. Circumstances may require that an officer be reviewed before the scheduled time. A review meeting may be called by a majority of the elders (or by a majority of the other elders in the case of an elder). Members also may request such a meeting under the provision of Art. IX.B.

2. The purpose for the review of officers is to gauge the church's continuing support for her officers and to encourage those officers who have continued in the faithful discharge of their responsibilities.

3. Any meeting for the review of officers must be announced on four Lord's Days prior to its being held. At this meeting, a unanimous vote is desirable; however, if unanimity is not realized, no less than three-fourths of the ballots cast is required for election.

At least four weeks prior to a review meeting, the elders will remind the congregation of the scriptural qualifications for church office.

Any member concerned about an officer's continuing qualifications must speak to the officer privately before the review meeting is held. If the matter is not resolved privately, the concerned member must inform the church's officers (acting as a board of review) and present factual warrant of his concern. In such cases, the board of review shall abide by the principles found in 1 Tim. 5:19-20.

If a majority of the board of review judges that the concern has no basis in fact or does not constitute a biblical disqualification, the matter is considered closed.

If a majority of the board of review judges that the concern has a basis in fact and is of such gravity as to constitute a biblical disqualification, or if a majority of the board of review cannot come to agreement, the congregation will be informed about the matter. In such cases the judgment of the congregation, expressed by vote according to the terms of Art. VII.F.3, shall be final. Furthermore, in these cases, after the congregation has been informed about the matter in question, the congregation will have at least four weeks to consider the case before being asked to vote. During this time the members are expected carefully to consider the facts. Any member having further information relevant to the case is expected to bring such information to the elders. Any new

information which a majority of the board of review judges is relevant will be reported to the congregation. If necessary, in order to allow due process, the review meeting will be postponed another four weeks in order to enable the congregation to consider new information.

At meetings called for the reconfirmation of an officer, discussion shall be limited to positive comments concerning the officer under review and to concerns referred to the congregation under the terms of the due process described above. At such meetings, anyone who tries to bring an accusation against an officer without such due process will be publicly rebuked as disorderly.

4. An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly way and for valid reasons. This resignation, together with its reasons and proposed effective date, must be submitted in writing to the elders.

G. Financial Support of Elders

1. Though all elders are equal in authority, not all possess gifts warranting financial support by the church. Special ability in ruling and especially in public teaching are gifts worthy of financial support. Before giving regular financial support, the church must judge that an elder possesses such special ability and that his employment meets the present need of the church.

2. The elders may recommend to the church that an existing elder or nominee be supported. A business meeting, announced for at least four Lord's Days, will be held to discuss and vote on this recommendation. During this meeting, special attention will be given to the relevant teaching of Scripture.⁴⁷ A unanimous vote is desirable; however, if unanimity is not realized, no less than three-fourths of the ballots cast is required.

⁴⁷*Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:1-18*

If this meeting coincides with an elder's confirmation or reconfirmation to office, the procedures set for due process in such cases will take precedent over the procedure set out in this paragraph.

3. The financial support of an elder may be subject to review. Review is warranted when an elder is no longer able to carry out those duties for which he is being supported, when the church no longer needs his services, or when the church is no longer able to support him. In such cases, the elders and deacons shall constitute a board of review and recommend to the church that support be ended. In such cases, a unanimous vote is desirable; however, if unanimity is not realized, no less than three-fourths of the ballots cast is required.

The ending of financial support does not constitute a removal from office. An elder's continuing qualification for office is subject to review as a separate matter under Art. VII.F.

H. Loss of a Plurality of Elders

If a plurality of elders ceases to exist in this church, the members are urged to pray fervently and unceasingly for the resolution of this deficiency. If this lack cannot be supplied in a timely way, the remaining elder, or the deacons if there is no elder, may lead the church to seek counsel and assistance from the pastors of a church holding to the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. Those pastors will have no ruling authority in this church; however, believing that there is safety in a

multitude of counselors (Prov. 11:14), their counsel will be seriously considered. A sole remaining elder may also enlist the deacons as a board of counsel. This is not to be considered as investing them with a ruling office; but, as men of proven judgment, their counsel is valuable and should be sought in matters of major concern in the life of the church.

I. Loss of all Elders

Duties and responsibilities specified in this constitution as belonging to the office of elder ordinarily should be performed by the elders. Should the church be without an elder, the deacons may perform these duties in so far as they are necessary for the orderly functioning of the church. The deacons will also lead the church in seeking an elder. For those duties which an elder ordinarily would perform in conjunction with church membership (Art. IV), church discipline (Art V.), serving on the nominating committee (VII.E.2.a), and officiating at the Lord's Table, and conducting baptisms, the deacons shall seek assistance from one or more elders currently serving in, or retired in good standing from, a church holding to the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith.

The consent of the assisting elders shall be obtained and their names announced at a duly called business meeting. Approval of the proposed assisting elders must be by consent of a majority of members present and voting at that meeting. While assisting the church, these elders will have no ruling authority in this church. (Acts 14:21-23; Phil. 4:15; London Confession 26:15).

The Lord's Supper may be officiated by an elder presently serving a church holding to the 1689 LBCF without being designated as an assisting elder.

Article VIII

Official Board

In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," this church shall have an official board of trustees, consisting of the elders and deacons. The members of this board shall serve as the legal representatives of the church. In the event that the church has no elected officers, the remaining members shall elect a board of trustees to serve in this capacity until new officers are installed.

Article IX

Church Meetings

A. The Annual Business Meeting

An annual church business meeting shall be held in the first quarter of each calendar year. At this meeting reports will be submitted by the officers to the congregation, including a financial report for the previous year and a proposed budget for the coming year, and a report of the current status of all members. These reports, including the proposed budget, must be approved by a vote of the church. In addition to the annual report, the treasurer shall produce a quarterly financial statement which will be distributed to members.

B. Occasional Business Meetings

Church business meetings may be called by the elders or when one-half of the voting members request such a meeting. This request must be written and state the specific reason for the meeting, be signed by one-half of the members in good standing, and be presented to the elders, who in turn shall announce the meeting. The meeting must be held within thirty days of receipt of the written request. Such meetings must limit their business to the specific reason for which they are called. Every meeting at which business is to be transacted shall be announced at regular services for at least two Lord's Days. Other meetings at which no business is transacted by vote may be called at the discretion of the elders without previous notice.

C. Voting

All members in good standing constitute the voting membership of the church. Unanimity is desired; however, in cases when this is not realized, no less than a two-thirds majority of those voting will make a resolution valid. In matters where this Constitution requires a different proportionate vote, those provisions override the two-thirds figure established here.

The voting members present at any properly convened business meeting shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The elders will cancel any business meeting if through an act of God (such as inclement weather or widespread sickness) an unusually large proportion of the members cannot be present. The elders will also avoid scheduling business meetings at a time when it is known in advance that an unusually large proportion of the members will be unable to attend. This provision should not be construed as allowing a boycott of a meeting in order to prevent the conduct of business. Nor does it prevent a business meeting at a time other than on the Lord's Day.

Article X

Constitutional Authority

This Constitution is not infallible; however, it reflects a sincere attempt to apply the Scriptures in ordering the life of this church. As members, we solemnly commit ourselves to follow this Constitution in ordering the life of this church. The demands of the ninth commandment require that we abide by our mutual commitment.

Only when we must obey God rather than this Constitution may its provisions be disregarded. If at any time a member concludes that submission to this Constitution violates biblical principle, he should make this known to the elders. If the elders agree that biblical principle requires disregarding a provision of this Constitution, they are required to report this to the church within four weeks at a properly called business meeting. Moreover, relevant amendments to this Constitution must be submitted to the church and acted upon in accordance with the provisions of the following paragraph within one year of this informational meeting. The elders' failure to observe these requirements constitutes a legitimate reason for the members to call a special meeting in accordance with Art. IX.B.

Amendments to this Constitution may be adopted by three-fourths of those voting at any meeting called for this purpose, provided that such proposed amendments have been distributed in written form to the membership at least four weeks prior to the meeting.