

Santa Teresa Baptist Church

Constitution and Bylaws

Adopted By Unanimous Consent of the Members
December 2005

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A Word to the Reader

We heartily welcome the interest that you have shown in our congregation and in the possibility of joining us as a full member in the service of God. The Elders, Deacons and members of the congregation will unite with you in prayer at this time as you study our Constitution and Bylaws. We pray that God would guide all concerned in the important issue of your membership in our church. It is a great privilege as well as a duty commanded to us by God to give ourselves one to another, and all of us together to him, in the framework of a local congregation. It is also a step that should be taken only after clear and conscientious thought.

We ask you to read the following with great attention, so that you will understand what are the privileges, duties and contents of our faith, all of which form the basis of our congregating together. The Constitution and Bylaws are not meant to be a substitute for the Scriptures – they serve to express our united understanding of God's holy word (*1 Corinth. 1:10*). As such, being, we believe, a true representation of what the scriptures command or teach, they bind us through our express agreement with them when we join the congregation.

Wherever the Constitution, Confession, or the Bylaws of our church are found to contradict the Scriptures, we shall be willing to change them as soon as the contradiction is proven; but we shall faithfully abide by them until they are changed. In matters where the scriptures do not speak explicitly, we have decided upon practices according to the general biblical principle that all things are to be done decently and in propriety, because God is not the Author of confusion but of peace and of order (*1 Corinth. 14:33,40*). Practices that do not derive directly from the scriptures serve only to preserve order in the congregation. These practices are not to be taken as binding the conscience.

We will be happy to answer any question that may arise from the reading of this document. Please bring your questions to one of the Elders and he will do his best to answer you from the Scriptures. The principles of faith presented here are not the whole of Christian doctrine. No effort to sum up in words, could ever exhaust the breadth, depth, height and surpassing glory of the Gospel. Nor are these principles of our faith meant to indicate who, in our opinion, is a Christian or what is the minimum with which one is to be considered a Christian. The secrets of the heart are ultimately known only to God. We confess that there are many who differ from us, whom we unhesitatingly consider to be not only our brethren in Christ and in faith but who, we freely admit, exceed us in many ways.

We did not seek the least common denominator, but the greatest, although we endeavored to limit ourselves to those areas in which agreement is necessary, useful and helpful to proper congregational life; and, in our view, also to healthy Christian living according to the commandments of God. What is stated here, therefore, is what we consider to be essential for the realization of proper congregational life. We respect those who differ from us; yet we insist upon our conviction that the Constitution and our Confession faithful representations of the teaching of scripture, and we are willing to submit this claim to the test of all and any.

As for the Bylaws, some of them derive directly from the Scriptures. Others are only implied. This document, first, expresses our understanding of the essential nature of the Christian church, its mode of activity, and the areas of its responsibility. Second, it defines various details of practice, which we believe to be not only needful, but also expressive of the weightier matters of essence. There is no doubt that agreement in these matters is essential. Without such agreement, it would be impossible to live together in community. As for the details of practice described here, we understand that there are different ways to practice the same principles. All that is necessary is that there be mutual agreement in these things within the context of each congregation. After all, if there is no common practice, there will be no practice at all. The practical details are the least important of what is said here, and they are more open to change, improvement and correction than any other section.

We do not require unequivocal agreement with all that is written in this booklet; we have purposely expanded it so it could serve as a basic introduction for new believers into the faith of Jesus Christ and into congregational living. We neither expect nor demand that candidates for membership in our congregation agree with us in every detail.

On the other hand, this document expresses our mutual understanding of the Christian faith of true Christian congregational life. In other words, this Constitution and Bylaws lie at the foundation of our life together as a church. For this reason, the only condition we put before candidates for membership in the church is that they read these documents thoroughly and that they be able to testify that they will be willing to live with us according to these principles, and to undertake they will not work contrary to them. As long as there is no disagreement on the fundamentals and a willingness to live in peace on all other matters, we are able to live together and edify one another. Many matters are left here untouched. In these, each member is at liberty to believe and practice according to his own convictions.

Finally, we do not claim to be original or to have obtained special wisdom. To the contrary. All that we know, if indeed we know anything, has been taught us by others in Christ. As can be easily demonstrated, the views expressed in this document are shared by the majority of Christians throughout history. We rejoice to acknowledge ourselves to be part of that glorious history - in spite of its shortcomings.

Please read the following carefully. May it please God to guide you as you read, in order that together we might know the will of God concerning your joining us as a member of this congregation.

The Elders

Constitution

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Santa Teresa Baptist Church

CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Santa Teresa Baptist Church, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

ARTICLE I

Name

The name of this church shall be “First Baptist Church of Santa Teresa, New Mexico”, doing business as Santa Teresa Baptist Church.

ARTICLE II

Purpose

The purpose of this church is to glorify the True God of the Scriptures *in* (*Eph. 3:2*) by promoting and practicing His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints through fellowship and the teaching the word of God. To this end we are committed to proclaiming God's perfect law and His glorious Gospel of Grace in Jesus Christ throughout the world, and to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered unto the saints” (*Jude 3*).

ARTICLE III

Articles of Faith

ARTICLE III, Articles of Faith

We do hereby adopt, as the fullest expression of our faith, The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 **with the below exceptions**. This ancient document is a most excellent summary of things most surely believed among us. We accept the same, not as an authoritative rule or code of faith, whereby we are to be fettered, but as an assistance to us in

controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of instruction in righteousness. In this Confession the members of our church have a body of divinity in small compass and Scriptural proofs to assist them to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them (*I Peter 3: 15*).

Exceptions

(1) Chapter 26, paragraph 4 will read only that: The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, all power for calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner. (December 8, 2004.)

ARTICLE IV

Membership

Section 1 – The Meaning of Membership

The New Testament teaches that a local church is a body of believers (*1 Corinth. 2:27*) who have joined together to serve God in Christ (*1 Pet. 2:7*), and to demonstrate the Gospel in the world (*1 Pet. 2:9*), because they belong to one another in Christ (*Rom. 12:5*). Every person who joins the church takes upon himself the responsibility to cultivate friendship and cooperation with all the members of the church (*Eph. 4:15,16*). He further takes upon himself to devote himself to his brothers' spiritual good (*Gal. 6:10*), to hide their sins in love (*Proverbs 10:12*), lovingly bear their burdens (*Gal. 6: 1,2*) and support them in prayer and in every other way. Sharing in church life is a privilege leading to wonderful blessings for all who fulfill their duties.

Every member of the church is expected to contribute (*Eph. 4:16*) to the development of a truly spiritual and human fellowship by striving after practical holiness (*1 Pet. 1:15*), love of all the brethren (*1 Pet. 1:22*), regular attendance at all meetings and activities of the church (*Heb. 10:25*), and financial support and active participation according to his ability and calling (*Rom. 12:4-18*). A member who is guilty of any act that might bring shame to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be subject to the rebuke of the church (*1 Corinth. 5:12*), to its discipline (*Matt. 18:17*), and to its love in Christ.

Section 2 – Requirements for Membership

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized by immersion as a believer, and who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines, aims, and government of this church shall be eligible for membership. To promote doctrinal integrity and unity of the faith (*Eph. 4:13*), it is understood that each individual seeking membership will have become sufficiently familiar with the Confession of Faith¹ and Constitution of this church to establish grounds for mutual agreement. Consequently, the Elders will provide reasonable assistance to those seeking membership to enlarge their understanding of these important expressions of faith.

A. BY CONFESSION OF FAITH – Any person who meets the above mentioned requirements shall apply for membership to one of the Elders. The Elders shall then fix a time and place for a meeting with the applicant, who shall attend and be questioned as to his or her basic Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and seriousness of intention to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this church (*Philemon*).

B. BY LETTER – Any person desiring to unite with this church, upon letter of recommendation from another evangelical church shall be examined by the Elders concerning his or her Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and seriousness of intention to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this church (*Philemon*). They shall be received as members upon

¹ By a... Confession of Faith, [we] mean an exhibition, in human language, of those great doctrines which are believed by the framers of it to be taught in the holy scriptures; and which are drawn out in regular order, for the purpose of ascertaining how far those who wish to unite in church fellowship are really agreed in the fundamental principles of Christianity. Creeds and confessions do not claim to be in themselves laws of Christ's house, or legislative enactments, by which any set of opinions are constituted truths, and which require, on that account, to be received as truths among the members of his family. They only profess to be summaries, extracted from the scriptures, of a few of those great gospel doctrines which are taught by Christ himself; and which those who make the summary in each particular case concur in deeming important, and agree to make the test of their religious union. They have no idea that, in forming this summary, they make anything truth that was not truth before; or that they thereby contract an obligation to believe what they were not bound by the authority of Christ to believe before. But they simply consider it as a list of the leading truths which the Bible teaches, which, of course, all men ought to believe, because the Bible does teach them; and which a certain portion of the visible church catholic agree in considering as a formula, by means of which they may know and understand one another. (*Extracted from Doctrinal Integrity, The Utility and Importance of Creeds by Samuel Miller.*)

condition of receiving a letter of recommendation from their previous church.

Section 3 – Forms of Membership

- A. REGULAR – All who are received into the membership of the church on the above mentioned conditions shall be considered members in good standing until such status is changed by one of the conditions set forth in Article IV, Section 4. Any change in the status of membership shall be determined by a two-thirds vote of the Eldership.
- B. OTHER – The membership status of invalids, Christian workers, and others whose relationship to the church involves special consideration and circumstances, shall be determined in each case by a two-thirds vote of the Eldership.

Section 4 – Procedure for Receiving New Members

When the Board of Elders is satisfied that an applicant gives a credible profession of faith and meets the requirements for membership, the Board, by two-thirds majority vote, will present the person for membership at any congregational meeting. The congregation may accept that person as a member by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present and voting. The right hand of fellowship will be extended to the new member by the members of the church at a regular worship service.

Section 5 – Termination of Membership

- A. BY TRANSFER – Letters of recommendation shall be granted by the Eldership to churches which request them, provided the member in question is in good standing and not subject to or under discipline at the time of the application. When such letters have been granted, the relationship to this church shall be considered terminated. Letters of dismissal shall be forwarded and given only to other evangelical churches.
- B. BY DISCIPLINE – It is right and in harmony with the Scriptures for the congregation, upon recommendation of the Eldership, to exclude from this fellowship (*Matt. 18:15ff*) any person who persists in holding false or

heretical doctrine (*1 Tim. 1:3*); or who obviously and persistently lives a life inconsistent with his Christian profession (*2 Thess. 3:6, 11, 15*); or who lives in violation of the law of the land or public morals (*1 Cor. 5:1 ff*); or who walks disorderly; or any person who persists in disturbing the unity and peace of this church (*Tit. 3:10; Rom. 16:12*); or who habitually absents himself from the stated meetings of this church without just cause (*Heb. 10:23-25*).

ARTICLE V

Conduct of Members

Section 1 – Means of Grace

The members of the church shall be encouraged and guided by the Elders (*Eph. 4:11,12*) and the other members of the church (*Eph. 4:15,16*), each according to his ability and calling, to make use of all public and private means of grace. These include keeping the Sabbath (*Ex. 20:8; Matt. 12:12; 28:20*), regular attendance at the services of the church (*Heb. 10:25*), daily systematic reading of the Bible, and private and family prayers.

Section 2 – Government of the Home

The church expects its members to follow the Scriptures in home government. God requires that godliness in the home have a high priority in everyday life. The home holds a central attention in God's Law and is the object of frequent exhortation in the New Testament. Men are expected to rule their homes with gentleness but firmness in love (*Eph. 5:28*). Women must be subject to their husbands in everything as unto the Lord (*Eph. 5:22*). Parents should train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (*Eph 6:4*) by holy example, catechizing, consistent education, and firm discipline (including corporal punishment (*Proverbs 13:24*)). Children must reverently obey their parents (*Eph. 6:1*). These primary responsibilities, prayerfully executed, will honor the name of Christ in the community and strengthen the cause of Christ in generations to come.

Section 3 – Missions and Witnessing

It is the duty of every Christian and of every church of Christ to seek to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Missionary efforts are the natural consequences of regeneration (*Ps. 51:10-14*). It is the duty of every child of God to witness by life and word. Personal efforts at witnessing for Christ are expected of every member. Beyond this, we are committed to common efforts for sending the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Section 4 – Principles of Giving

We assert our conviction that Christians are to support the work of the Lord by offerings made to the local church. Proportionate giving is a distinct and positive command in Scripture (*Mal. 3:8-11, Matt. 23:23*); hence, we pledge ourselves to systematic contribution for the support of this church with a proportion of our income according to the principle in 1 Corinthians 16:2.

Section 5 – Christian Liberty

We shall require of each other in our daily walk and conversation loyal obedience to all those moral precepts established in the Word of God (*Heb. 10:24-25*); however, where God has not prohibited certain practices in His Word, the Christian has liberty to participate in them. The following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

- A. FEAR OF GOD – As the servant of Christ, all action must be motivated by love to God, and all objects must be used for His glory. The term "liberty" is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which is sin (*1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:15-16*).
- B. LOVE OF BRETHREN – Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow saints must always deeply affect his decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent their stumbling. (*Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Cor. 8:9; Rom. 14:21-23*).

C. COMPASSION FOR THE UNCONVERTED – Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and behavior chosen which is likely to win some (*1 Cor. 9:19-22*).

D. WATCHFULNESS OVER THE SOUL – Though free in conscience to use all of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded because of remaining lusts. Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain in order to Scripturally persevere (*1 Cor. 9:23-27*). (See Article VIII, Section 6 for further application of these principles to worship.)

Section 6 – Support of the Church Leaders

It is the duty of every member to respect the God-appointed officers of the church. The duties of church members toward their elders, deacons, teachers, and ministers, are as follows:

- A. To pray for them, that God would open a door of utterance unto them, to unfold the mysteries of the Gospel (*2 Corinth. 1:11; Eph. 6:18-20*).
- B. To obey the Elders in the Lord, in whatsoever they admonish them, according to the Word of God (*Heb. 13:17-22; 3 John 3,4*).
- C. To follow their example and footsteps, as far as warranted by the Word (*1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; Phil. 3:17; Heb. 13:7*).
- D. To stand by them, in all their trials and afflictions, and to defend them in all good causes, as far as each member is able. In 2 Tim. 1:5 those of Asia are blamed for turning away or not standing by the Apostle.
- E. In the event of the necessity of exposing the infirmities of the officers, let it be done according to the principles of Matt. 18:15-21 and 1 Tim. 5:19-20, with soberness and charity for the sake of the Gospel.
- F. To support the Elders financially within the guidelines of 1 Tim. 5:17 (see Article VII, Section 2D.)

Section 7 – Congregational Voting

Recognition of church officers by way of nomination and election are responsibilities of voting members. Receiving members into the fellowship of the church, the exercise of excommunication and restoration by vote, and the commitment of the church to the annual church budget will also be the responsibility of the congregation.

ARTICLE VI

Church Discipline

Section 1 – Formative Discipline

Formative discipline is that positive work of grace that pertains to the formation or development of the Christian character. It is primarily achieved through the preaching and teaching of God's Word, the example of Christian living, and the mutual ministry of the several members of the body of Christ. It has as its objective the training of disciples, the transformation of their lives, and the edification of the saints in love (*Eph. 4:11-13; Rom. 12:1-16; 1Cor. 12:4-27*). Formative discipline has a sanctifying influence. All members should seek to grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (*1 Pet. 4:7-12*), and to strive to be identify, develop and exercise their God-given gifts and ministry. Formative discipline utilizes the talents of each church member, young and old, for the good of all. All who have been redeemed by Christ should live for Him and His church and not for themselves.

As members of this church we recognize our obligation to honor, serve, worship, praise, and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ in all that we say and do (*1 Cor 10:31*). Jesus Christ is the head of the church and, therefore, we endeavor to keep His commandments (*John 14:15*). In His Holy Word our Lord has entreated believers to perform certain duties one toward another. Some of these duties are:

- A. To love one toward another without offense or hypocrisy (*John 13:34-35; Rom. 12:9-10; 13:8-10*).
- B. To labor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (*Eph. 4:3*).

C. To strive for the edification and spiritual benefit of the whole body, that they all may grow up to be a holy temple in and for the Lord (*1 Cor. 14:12,26; Eph. 4:12,29; 2:21-22*).

D. To look out for the best interests of others (*Phil. 2:3,4*).

E. To pray with and for one another (*James 5:16*).

F. To NOT neglect the assembling of themselves together, for the celebrating of divine worship, and so promote one another's spiritual well-being (*Heb. 10:25; Acts 2:42*).

G. To unanimously contend for the faith and truth that was once for all delivered to the saints, in the purity thereof, according to the Holy Scripture (*Ps. 93:5; Zec. 14:2; 1 Cor 14:33-40; 11:2; Jude 3*).

The above duties, when faithfully performed by all, will have a positive, formative effect upon the whole assembly; and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit will enable each member to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Section 2 – Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline results from disorderly conduct or heretical doctrine which is contrary to the church's standard of life and doctrine. Reasonable efforts shall be made to resolve difficulties and remove offenses before any action is taken. No offenses shall be brought before the church until the instructions of Scripture have first been followed (*Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15; Gal. 6:1-2*).

Corrective discipline always has for its aims the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church, and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender.

A. **EXCLUSION** – If a member is habitually absent from the fellowship of this church without just cause, or requests severance of membership, he or she may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the Board of Elders.

B. EXPULSION – We recognize termination of church membership as a disciplinary measure to be a most serious action; however, in order that the purity of the Church may be maintained, any member guilty of a serious offense and remaining unrepentant despite repeated admonitions must be removed from the membership of the Church. Yet our zeal for the glory of God must ever be tempered by a loving and prayerful concern for the full restoration of the offender. The procedure followed depends upon the nature of the offense; however, the following procedure shall be followed in most cases. The suspected person shall first be interviewed as directed in Matthew 18:15-18. If this does not lead to restoration of fellowship, charges shall be filed with the eldership. After a fair and impartial hearing of all the witnesses accessible and all the facts ascertainable, and if the eldership unanimously believes the accused to be guilty, the eldership shall make an appropriate recommendation to the congregation for their action at a regularly or special called congregational meeting. The congregation shall have the right to excommunicate a member by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present and voting.

C. RESTORATION TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP – The right to exclude or excommunicate persons or the withdrawal of fellowship (*1 Cor. 5; 2 Thes. 3:6*) is in harmony with the teachings of the New Testament (*Matt. 18:16-17*). Likewise, the church also had a right to restore those persons who gave satisfactory evidence of repentance (*2 Cor. 2:6-8*). The object of the discipline being accomplished, the congregation shall have the right to restore the repentant member to full membership, under the recommendation of the eldership and by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present and voting.

ARTICLE VII

Church Officers

Section 1 – General Statement

Jesus Christ alone is Head of the church (*Col. 1:18*). He governs His church through office-bearers whom He appoints and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Office-bearers in the church are of two kinds: Elders (also called Bishops and Pastors) and Deacons (*Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13*). It is the duty of the church

to seek from among its male members those that Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for office-bearing. After formally recognizing them by congregational vote, the church shall set them apart by united prayer, and then submit to their God-given authority. No less than a three-fourths majority of the members present and voting shall be required for the election of an officer.

When the church is too small to maintain both offices, one Board will function as both an Elder and Deacon board until such time as separate boards are able to be established. In cases where one Board functions in the capacity of both Elders and Deacons, ALL REFERENCES IN THIS CONSTITUTION OR BY-LAWS TO EITHER ELDERS OR DEACONS WILL APPLY TO THAT ONE BOARD (*Acts 6:1 ff; Titus 1:5*).

In the case that the church no longer has qualified officers, the membership may invite another like-minded congregation to oversee the church until such time that qualified officers are raised up.

Section 2 – Elders

A. PLURALITY AND PARITY – The Scriptures indicate that normally there should be a plurality of Elders in the local church (*Acts 20:17; Phil. 1:1*). These men are called “Bishops” (meaning overseers) because they have oversight of the assembly (*Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2; Heb. 13:17*). They are called the “Pastor-teachers” given to the church “*for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering unto the building up on the body of Christ*” (*Eph. 4:11-12; Acts 20:28*). There is parity (equality) among the Elders, each bearing authority in the deliberations and decisions of the Board of Elders. Thus the plurality and parity of the Elders guard the flock from the weaknesses of rule by one man and use the collective wisdom of several godly men to rule the flock of God as one Board.

B. QUALIFICATIONS – The qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of Elder are clearly set forth in *1 Tim. 3:1-7* and *Titus 1:5-9*. The recognition of these qualifications by the congregation will help prevent the infiltration of hirelings who forsake the flock and wolves who enter in and destroy the flock (*John 10:12-13; Acts 20:28-30*). Any man called to the Eldership must be competent in his understanding of and able

conscientiously to affirm his agreement with and support of the Confession, Constitution and By-Laws of this church. Should he at any time move from his positions, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this fact known to the Elders for further consultation. In the event of irreconcilable differences after consultation, this fact must be made known to the church for further disposition.

C. RESPONSIBILITIES – All Elders are pastors of the flock (*Acts 20:28*). They are primarily responsible for the spiritual ministrations of the church, the implementation of discipline, the oversight of the souls of the members, and the oversight of all ministries and functions of the church. They shall give account to God for all things in the church (*Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2-3*).

While every Elder should be "apt to teach", some will be more engaged in formal and public teaching while others will be more engaged in pastoring (that is, private teaching and admonishing) and governing (*1 Tim. 5:17a*). The gifts of each man will be considered by the Board of Elders in assigning responsibilities. Elders gifted for preaching shall participate in the preaching of the church.

It shall be the duty of the Elders to attend to the training and equipping of the saints for works of service, while striving, through sound teaching and preaching, and speaking the truth in love, to press for the unity of the faith and maturity of the faithful (*Eph. 4:11-16*). Accordingly, Elders shall regularly visit each of the church members and shall be available to them for advice, encouragement, comfort, exhortation and teaching. They shall meet together frequently for prayer, discussions and thought about matters relating to the church, and provide mutual assistance to one another as they oversee the work of the church (*Acts 15:6*).

It shall be the duty of the Elders to be diligent and faithful in attendance at the Board of Elders meetings and the regular services of the church. They shall make suggestions regarding the pulpit ministry and encourage the one preaching in the work of the Lord. Elders may call upon one or more of the Deacons to assist them in the fulfillment of their responsibilities.

One or more of the Elders (usually the supported Elder or Elders) may use the title of “Pastor” for the sake of denominational communication and public contacts.

D. SUPPORT – In view of the fact that the responsibilities of the eldership are numerous and great, Scripture makes provision for the financial support of Elders. First Timothy 5:17 encourages the support of “*elders who rule well*” (oversight) and “*especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.*” Thus a congregation may support more than one Elder in the various duties of that office but should place priority on the teaching function.

E. ELECTION – The normal procedure in the New Testament for the election of Elders is the process of recognition (*1 Tim. 3:1-13*). For this reason, the congregation normally will look first among its members for officers (see By-Laws, Article III). However, in the event that none of the Elders possess sufficient proficiency to be financially supported so as to “*labor in preaching and teaching*” (*1 Tim. 5:17b*), the Elders may look outside the congregation for such a man. In such a case, the Elders and the congregation should exercise extreme caution to avoid introducing a hireling or wolf into the flock (*John 10:12-13; Acts 20:28-30*). The procedure for the election of Elders is outlined in By-Laws Article III, Section 2.

F. LENGTH OF SERVICE – The Holy Spirit equips and places Elders in the church (*Acts 20:28*). Therefore, the church cannot arbitrarily fix either the number of Elders or their term of service. Therefore, the term of service for Elders and Deacons is indefinite except for certain cases discussed in By-Laws Article III, Section 2.

ARTICLE VIII

Board of Elders

The Board of Elders shall consist of all of the duly elected Elders. There is parity (equality) among the Elders, each bearing equal authority in the deliberations of the Board of Elders.

Section 1 – Responsibility of the Board of Elders

The Board shall have the general oversight of all this church's affairs. The conduct of all church business and the work of all church organizations shall be subject to its supervision and government. The Board of Elders shall meet in accordance with the church By-Laws, Article IV, Section 2. The Board secretary shall keep minutes of each meeting. The minutes of all meetings shall be made public by posting a copy of the minutes in a public place in the church within two weeks of a meeting of the board. All board matters of a personal matter dealing with discipline, etc., will be kept confidential.

Section 2 – Officers of the Board of Elders

Following each annual congregational meeting, at its first meeting, the Officers of the Board of Elders shall be elected from the membership of the Board of Elders to serve for one year, or until their successors are elected.

Section 3 – Membership and Discipline

The Board shall accept applicants for church membership, and apply discipline to offending members in accordance with Article VI. The Elders shall watch over the souls of the flock as "*they that must give account*" (*Heb. 13:17*). They must be persistent in prayer for, visitation of, and instruction of the membership and its families.

Section 4 – Church Officers and Teachers

The Board shall appoint the overseers of all church ministries and groups from among the board membership. The overseers shall, upon request, present to the Board, for its approval, all subordinate ministry teachers and leaders.

Section 5 – Pulpit Supply

The Elders have complete responsibility for the teaching ministry of the church. It shall be the duty of the Board of Elders to supply the pulpit

with men whose ministry in our church shall be consistent with the Confession of this church.

Section 6 – Administration of Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The Elders shall examine and approve candidates for professor's baptism and church membership. The Elders shall have complete oversight over the administration of the Lord's Supper. Christian liberty in the matters of food and drink has application to the relationship between believers at all times and places (*Rom. 14:20-21; 1 Cor. 10:31-32*). This is especially true at the Lord's Supper, the supreme symbol of Christian unity (*1 Cor. 10:14-17, 23-24, 31-33*). While acknowledging that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper with the elements of the Passover (unleavened bread and mixed wine), it must also be noted that the New Testament seems to allow some degree of liberty in the choice of the elements. Jesus used the generic term "fruit of the vine" instead of the specific term "wine" (*Matt. 26:29; Num. 6:3-5*). Providing biblical harmony with Paul's instructions on Christian liberty (*Rom. 14:20-21; 1 Cor. 10:14-17, 31-33*). Also, the broken bread of the Lord's Supper on the day of Pentecost was most likely the leavened bread of that feast (*Lev. 23:16-17; Acts 2:42*). Therefore, the Elders of this church shall exercise wisdom and liberty in accordance with the above principles in the selection and administration of the elements of the Lord's Supper for our worship.

Section 7 – Grievances and Suggestions

The Board of Elders shall receive, consider, and dispose of any grievance, suggestion, or recommendation by any member or organization of this church.

Section 8 – Miscellaneous Duties

The Board of Elders shall exercise oversight over all other powers and duties which properly belong to a local church, congregation and corporation, but shall at all times be subject to the two-thirds vote of the congregation unless otherwise stated.

ARTICLE IX

Board of Deacons

The Board of Deacons shall consist of all this church's duly elected Deacons.

Section 1 – Ministry of Mercy

The primary responsibility of the Board of Deacons is the ministry of mercy in our church and community. The Deacons shall see that the sick, the sorrowing, the aged, and the feeble-minded receive the support of the church in relationship to their needs and the ability of the church.. They shall minister the word of God, administer this church's benevolence funds, and render counsel to those in need of succor. They shall be vigilant for opportunities to do good, especially to those who are of the household of faith. They shall direct the attention of the Elders to any spiritual need that comes to their knowledge.

The Board of Deacons shall meet in accordance to the church By-Laws Article IV, Section 2, in order to administer those things committed to them. The Board secretary shall keep minutes of each meeting. The minutes of all meeting shall be published and distributed to each Deacon and Elder within two weeks after the meeting.

Section 2 – Officers of the Board of Deacons

The Board of Deacons shall reorganize at its first regular meeting following each annual congregational meeting. A president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer shall be elected to serve for one year or until their successors are elected.

Section 3 – Business Affairs

The Board of Deacons shall have general executive powers to administer the business affairs of this church. It shall be the Deacons' responsibility to prepare the church budget and submit it to a joint session of the Board of Elders and the Board of Deacons each year. Upon reaching joint

agreement to the proposed budget, the Board of Elders will submit the budget to the congregation for commitment by a three-fourths vote. It will be the Deacons' responsibility to administer the budget. The duty of caring for and maintaining the church's properties shall belong to this Board.

Section 4 – Limitation of Powers

The Board of Deacons shall not encumber, transfer, sell, or purchase any real estate for the church except by the express authorization conveyed by a three-fourths vote of the membership present and voting at a duly called congregational meeting. No obligation shall be incurred to spend over \$1000 on one item without the special vote of the congregation, unless that item already appears in the adopted budget. In the case of legal necessity, trustees may be elected from the Board of Deacons.

Section 5 – Representation at Meetings

The Board of Deacons shall inform the Board of Elders of all of their meetings so that a representative may be present. Likewise, the Board of Deacons may be asked to present regular reports of its business to the Board of Elders.

ARTICLE X

Commissions and Ordinations

Section 1 – Recognition for Specific Ministries

It is our hope that spirit-filled men will be called out from among us to proclaim the Gospel of the Grace of God. The Elders may oversee the identification and training of such men for preaching missions, planting churches, foreign missions, the military chaplaincy, etc.

When there is a prospective candidate for such ministries, the Board of Elders shall guide that person in his studies and preparation. It shall then call the Elders and the congregation to examine the qualifications of the candidate. It shall look into the soundness of his conversion, the godliness of his walk, the soundness of his doctrine, the degree of his gifts, the

extent of his training, and the blessing of God upon his labors for Christ. The Elders shall insure that the examination will conform to the requirements of the specific ministry.

If the Elders heartily recommend that the candidate be approved, the church may give the recommended commission by a three-fourths majority of the members present and voting at a congregational meeting.

Section 2 – Installation of Elders

In a regular worship service of the church, one of the Elders shall question newly elected Elders as follows:

- A. Do you believe the Scriptures as written in the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and do you accept them as the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
- B. Have you personally adopted and will you cheerfully submit to and defend the Confession, Constitution, and By-Laws of this church?
- C. Do you accept the Office of Elder readily, and do you promise to perform its duties of training, equipping, caring for, and protecting the flock of God in the fear of His name?

Then the hands of the existing Eldership shall be placed on the heads of the new Elders and prayer offered in their behalf. Following this, the people shall be exhorted to esteem and obey those whom God has placed over them.

Section 3 – Installation of Deacons

In a regular worship service of the church, one of the Elders shall question newly elected Deacons as follows:

- A. Do you believe the Scriptures as written in the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and do you accept them as the only infallible rule of faith and practice?

B. Have you personally adopted and will you cheerfully submit to and defend the Confession, Constitution, and By-Laws of this church?

C. Do you accept the Office of Deacon and do you promise to care for the poor and needy and to manage the business of this church in the fear of God?

Then the hands of the Elders shall be placed on the heads of the new Deacons and prayer offered in their behalf. Following this, the people shall be exhorted to esteem and obey those whom God has placed over them.

ARTICLE XI

Finances

The work of this church is financially dependent upon the voluntary gifts of God's people. Before the annual congregational meeting, the Board of Elders shall obtain from the Board of Deacons an estimate of the needs of the several divisions of the work, and a prepared budget, detailing the proposed expenditures for the coming year. When this budget is subscribed to by the vote of the congregation, it shall be considered the basis for the current liabilities. No committee or board is authorized to make changes in its provisions, or to make unauthorized disbursements without the consent of the congregation (Article IX, Section 3).

ARTICLE XII

Associations

When deemed necessary or worthwhile, this church may agree to a loose organizational association with other churches on the condition that its independence and this Constitution and By-Laws are preserved at all times. Such associations may be established upon recommendation by the Elders and after approval by a majority vote of the church. Severance of associations shall be determined in the same manner. The Council of Elders shall appoint representatives of the church in these associations. No such association shall have any kind of authority over the church in any area whatever.

ARTICLE XIII

Amendments

Amendments to the Constitution may be adopted by a three-fourths majority vote of the members present and voting at a congregational meeting, provided that such amendments have been distributed by the Board of Elders in written form at least two weeks prior to the congregational meeting.

By-Laws

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BY-LAWS

ARTICLE I **Congregational Meetings**

Section 1 – Notice of Meetings

Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at regular worship services on the two successive Sundays immediately prior to the meeting. In event of an emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each local member by mail of the time, place, and purpose of the congregational meeting.

Section 2 – Number of Meetings

Congregational meetings shall be held quarterly for the reception of reports and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the meeting. A congregational meeting shall be held in December and shall be called the Annual Meeting. The commitment to the budget shall take place at the Annual Meeting.

Section 3 – Method of Calling Meetings

It shall be the right and responsibility of the Board of Elders to call all congregational meetings. A written request to call a congregational meeting, stating clearly its purpose, signed by fifteen resident, voting members of the church in good and regular standing and presented to the Clerk, shall require the Board of Elders to call such a meeting. When special congregational meetings are called, notice must be given to the congregation as to the purpose.

Section 4 – Responsibility for Meetings

The Board of Elders shall arrange the details of all congregational meetings and see that all possible preparation for their successful conduct is made.

Section 5 – Quorum for Transaction of Business

The resident voting members present at any constitutionally called congregational meeting shall be considered a quorum for the transaction of business.

Section 6 – Voting Age

Any member of the church eighteen years of age or over, in good and regular standing, shall have the responsibility to vote on any question properly brought before the congregation.

ARTICLE II

Membership Roll

In order to keep an accurate membership roll, there shall be an annual review of the membership roll by the Elders one month prior to the Annual Meeting. All who have been inactive members for whatever cause (see Article VI, Section 2) will be classified “Inactive” and will be notified of this action in writing.

In the event such inactivity is not corrected through the counsel of the Elders, the Elders may suspend the voting rights of inactive members until the situation is resolved by further church discipline.

ARTICLE III

Officer Elections and Termination

Section 1 – General Requirements for Officer Elections

A. All nominees shall have been a member of the church for a reasonable period of time before being placed in nomination. No nominee who has been a member of the congregation for less than a year will be considered for nomination without the consent of the Elders.

B. Consent must be secured from the nominees before their names are placed before the congregation.

Section 2 – Election of Church Officers

A. GOD CALLS – It is God and not the church who raises up servants for His Church. The church bears witness to the divine initiative in a person by observing the affections of his heart being inclined to serve the church as an elder, deacon, teacher or minister. Teachers begin to demonstrate they are apt-to-teach by undertaking personal study and preparation, showing an uncanny interest in doctrine, and a freedom to be discipled and to disciple others. Mercy-givers begin to demonstrate their servant's hearts as they recognize and attend to the needs of elderly, affirm, and deprived members of the congregation. Stewards demonstrate their gifts of administration and care of church property by identifying and attending to the needs of the facilities and funds of the church. God impresses upon the congregation His gifting to the members as they begin to recognize, develop and offer their gifts in specific ways for the edification of the body.

B. THE CHURCH SEPARATES – It is the church that separates men from within its ranks to serve in the various offices of the church, as God leads.

1. Nominating Committee. Each year, at the Annual Meeting, a nominating committee shall be constituted for a one-year term. This committee shall consist of the existing Elders and three other members to be selected from the congregation by the Elders to serve as advisors on this committee. In order to obtain a more accurate consensus of the congregation's evaluation of the male members, the three members selected from the congregation may consist of men and women.
2. Nominations for Church Officers. It shall be the function of the nominating committee to review the biblical requirements for Elders and Deacons, and to receive nominations from the congregation for these offices. Nominations may be received from individual members at any time or from a list of the male membership distributed for nomination at any congregational meeting. When a significant number, decided by the elders (typically about 25%), of nominations for a particular man for a particular office is received by the committee from the resident

voting membership, the committee will examine the nominee's qualifications.

If the committee tentatively approves the nomination, subject to the agreement of the Elders, the committee will interview the nominee. Upon final approval, the committee will encourage the nominee to seek the office.

Each committee will consider nominations received only during its term of service and will then be dissolved.

3. Ordination Council. The committee, subject to the final approval of the Elders alone, shall post the names of all candidates for the office at least four Sundays prior to their examination. Anyone in the congregation who has scriptural grounds for objecting to any of the nominees, shall personally bring these concerns to the attention of the Board of Elders no later than two weeks prior to the congregational meeting for the candidate's examination.

In consultation with the candidates, the Elders will schedule an ordination examination of each candidate. The Ordination Council shall examine the candidates' profession of saving faith, his Christian experience, the holiness of his life, his understanding of Scriptures and his ability in matters relating to his calling, as the council sees fit.

Elders will be examined on their knowledge of Old and New Testament Scripture, theology, church history, ethics and practical theology, the Confession, and the Constitution as those who are "apt to teach" others, and charged with ruling well the church.

Deacons will be examined on these things in a more general way as "holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience."

The Ordination Council will either recommend or not recommend to the church the candidate for ordination.

4. Elections of Church Officers. Following the Ordination Council's endorsement of the candidate, a congregational meeting will be held one week after the examination to elect the candidate to office. Each candidate shall be voted on separately and independently from the other candidates by written ballot. Each candidate for office must receive a three-fourths majority of votes from those present and voting.
5. The Ordination. The installation service will be held as soon as possible in consultation with the newly elected officer (See Constitution, Article X, Sections 2 and 3 for officer installation.)

Section 3 – Termination of Service

The term of service for Elders and Deacons is permanent in nature. Therefore, church officers are not elected for a specific period of time. However, there must be allowances for the termination of service under certain circumstances.

A. LEAVE OF ABSENCE – After consultation with the Elders, an officer may request a leave of absence from the responsibilities of office for a certain period of time. If the Elders grant the request, this action should be reported to the congregation with an explanation. Extended leaves of absence beyond six months are at the discretion of the Elders and may require final resignation from office.

B. RESIGNATION – If an officer should make application to be released from office, the congregation should receive an explanation and release the officer from office by a two-thirds majority vote of those present and voting. In the case of releasing a supported Elder from office, support will continue for a period not to exceed ninety days until he is gainfully employed. His duties will continue until that time.

C. TERMINATION – If the relations between an officer and the congregation become detrimental to the welfare of the church, and the

officer has not submitted to the exhortations of the Board of Elders (*1 Tim. 5:19-20*), the Board of Elders shall have authority to consider this matter and recommend to the congregation the elder be terminated at a duly called congregational meeting. If the officer's life or performance of duties should violate the standards of this church, and the Board of Elders so recommend, the officer's responsibilities may be terminated immediately following a congregational meeting at which his dismissal has been requested by a two-thirds majority vote of those present and voting. If the officer is a supported Elder, his support shall continue for a period not to exceed ninety days until he is gainfully employed.

D. **DEPARTURE** – If an officer moves away from the community and can attend this church no longer, his service will be terminated after six months.

Section 4 – Interim Support for a Prospective Elder

The normal process for the election of Elders is to look first in the congregation. But in the even that none of the present Elders possess sufficient proficiency to be financially supported to "*labor in preaching and teaching*" (*1 Tim. 5:17*), the Elders may look outside the congregation for such a man. Extreme caution is urged to avoid hirelings and wolves entering the flock. After receiving nominations from the church, and after receiving the recommendation of the Nominating Committee, the Elders may invite a prospective Elder to visit the church for an interview, preaching, officers' meetings and congregational meeting.

It is preferred that the Elders work with only one candidate at a time. If the Elders and the Nominating Committee are satisfied with the prospective Elder's qualifications, they may propose that the congregation extend a call to the candidate for pastoral office. A three-fourths majority vote will be required for congregational approval.

At the discretion of the Elders and with the prior agreement of the prospective candidate, a confirmation vote may be required in some circumstances after a period of one year's service. This procedure is designed to protect the flock in certain cases. This may be required of candidates who are largely unknown to the church beforehand, or who

are presently without pastoral charge, or who have limited pastoral experience. In the event that the required three-fourths majority is not attained in the confirmation vote, the church will provide ninety days severance support to assist the candidate in his life plans, or less if mutually agreed upon.

ARTICLE IV

Church Boards

Section 1 – Monthly Meetings

The Board of Elders shall meet a minimum of twice monthly, and the Board of Deacons shall hold regular monthly meetings.

Section 2 – Quorum and Call for Meetings

The quorum of the Board of Elders or of the Board of Deacons shall be two-thirds of the total number of the Board. They shall meet at the call of their President, or at the request of any three members of the Board.

Section 3 – Duties of the Church Clerk

The Church Clerk shall be appointed by the Board of Elders from the Eldership. He shall keep a record of all business transacted at the congregational and Board of Elders meetings, keep an accurate record of the membership, and carry on all necessary correspondence for the Board of Elders and the congregation.

Section 4 – Duties of the Church Treasurer

The Church Treasurer shall be appointed by the Board of Elders from the Deaconate. The Treasurer shall deposit all church funds in a bank account or accounts, as instructed by the Board of Deacons, which account shall be opened and maintained in the name of the church. He shall disburse the same at the direction of the Board of Deacons. He shall make monthly reports to the Board of Deacons and an annual report to the congregation at the Annual Meeting. He shall submit his books for an annual audit prior to the Annual Meeting, and at such other times as he may be

directed by the Board of Deacons. He may be required to furnish a bond, the amount of which shall be determined by the Board of Deacons, and the cost of which shall be paid by the church. The Treasurer shall be primarily responsible for all offerings received by the church, and immediately following any service he shall count and keep a record of all offerings. An assistant Treasurer may be appointed from the Deaconate to assist in these duties.

ARTICLE V

Amendments to By-Laws

Amendments to the By-laws may be adopted by a three-fourths majority of the members present and voting at a congregational meeting, provided that such amendments have been distributed by the Board of Elders in written form at least two weeks prior to the congregational meeting.

ARTICLE VI

Dissolution

This church shall be considered dissolved when its membership concludes that it can no longer fulfill its hereto stated purpose of existence. In the event of dissolution, no donor, member, officer of the church, or private individual shall be entitled to share in the distribution of any assets of this church. Any assets of the church upon dissolution shall be used to pay any outstanding debts. Any remaining assets shall be divided among missionaries supported by the church at the time of dissolution, or the assets shall be given to another church of like faith and practice, holding to The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, or other similar religious organization that is qualified as a charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3), Internal Revenue Code of 1954, as amended.

We adjure you, if any man will note in this our confession, any article or sentence repugnant to God's Holy Word, that it would please him of his gentleness, and for Christian's charity sake, to admonish us of the same in writing; and we, upon our honour and fidelity, do promise him satisfaction from the Holy Scriptures, or due reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss.

(From the Foreword of the First Scots Confession)