

# Constitution

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## Eligibility

1. The qualifications for membership are:
  - a. Profession of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
  - b. Evidence that this profession is genuine seen in a scriptural experience of conversion, baptism by immersion following repentance and faith, willing submission to the teaching and government of the church, and consistent Christian living.
2. Applicants must have been in regular attendance at the services. No one may be received automatically by transfer from another church. Applicants may not be members of a secret society such as the Freemasons. No one may apply for baptism apart from the consideration of church membership.

## Procedure

3. At least two elders will interview the applicant and will report to the eldership as a whole. Applicants recommended for membership will be asked to study the Articles of Faith and the Constitution and discuss any points about which they may not be clear. Following the interview, the Elders shall bring the application to the church. Two weeks will then be given for members to share with the elders any reason why the applicant should not be received. If the church lacks elders then two church officers or two senior members should fulfill this function. Young converts with limited teaching may be unclear about some of the details. Such should not be debarred from membership for that reason. The matter is really covered by the clause on willing submission to the teaching and government of the church (1-b).
4. If serious objections are raised concerning the applicant's qualifications for church membership, the elders will interview the applicant again to determine whether to proceed with the application process. If there are no serious objections, the applicant will then be asked to give to the church an account of his faith. The church will then affirm the reception of the applicant into membership. Those requiring baptism for membership will be baptized as soon as possible.

## Responsibilities and Privileges

5. Members will normally be expected to be present regularly at services for public worship, especially the two Sunday services, the Lord's Table, the prayer meetings, and business meetings. Attendance is not only a duty, but a privilege given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ.
6. The responsibility of praying together with other members of the church on a regular basis must be clearly established for membership to be a reality. (Acts 2:42; 4:24; 12:5,12; 13:3; Matt. 18:19,20)
7. Each member should seek his own spiritual advancement through the use of regular daily Bible reading and study, with both private and family prayer, and by having a proper reverence for the observance of the Lord's Day. (Deut. 6:4-9; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim. 2:15; Ex. 20:8-11; Heb. 10:24-25).
8. Members shall seek to obey the teachings of Scripture in respect to family life: the husband and father as the God-appointed head of the family ruling over the household in gentleness and love but with

wisdom and firmness, and the wife in subjection to her husband in all things as his God-appointed helper. The husband with the wife must nurture their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord by setting a Godly example before them by consistently teaching them in the Scriptures and by wise and firm chastening as Scripture affirms. (Gen. 2:18-25; 3:16; Eph. 5:22-33; 6:1-4; Prov. 13:24; 22:6; Tit. 2:4-5).

9. Regular proportionate giving to the Lord's work according to our means and out of a spirit of generosity is a mark of a true worshipper, and is pleasing to God. Tithing of one's substance is commended as a guideline to giving. (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; 9:1-15; Heb. 13:6; Rom. 12:13; Mal. 3:8-11).
10. Elders, being ordained by the Holy Spirit to rule and pastor the flock of Jesus Christ, are to be honored and the flock are to submit to their spiritual authority. (Acts 20:28; I Cor. 9:14; 1 Thess. 5:12,13; I Tim. 5:17-20; Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 5:1-4).
11. Members are to work and pray zealously for the welfare and the coming of the kingdom of God and seek by all possible means to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Rom. 12:11; Phil. 1:27; I Cor. 9:19-23).
12. Members should undertake all Christian service connected with the church in consultation with the elders and other members rather than acting independently. (Acts 13:1-3; 14:27; Rom. 12:3-10,16; I Cor. 12:12-27).
13. Members should seek to avoid all causes of division in the body and strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. All members are to discern their place in the body of Christ and honor one another above themselves. (Rom. 14:13; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:2,3; Phil. 2:1-4; Col 3:12-14; Heb. 12:15)
14. Members are to promote holiness, edification and love among themselves, by praying for one another, by spurring one another on towards love and good deeds, by admonishing one another, by showing hospitality, by bearing one another's burdens, by forgiving one another. Members are to pray particularly for elders and deacons in the discharge of their duties. (Rom. 12:10-13; Gal. 6:1,2; Eph. 4:32; 6:18-20; Col. 3:16; Heb. 10:24,25; I Pet. 1:22; 4:8).
15. The behavior of believers in the community must accord with that wisdom and discretion which commends the gospel of Christ. (Rom. 13:1-7; I Cor. 6:1-6; Col. 4:5,6; I Thess. 4:11,12; I Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:5-8; I Pet. 2:12-17; 3:15-16).

## **Discipline**

16. Discipline arises out of the responsibilities of church membership. Its purpose is to uphold the glory and rule of the Lord Jesus Christ in His church, to maintain its purity here on earth, to sanctify each member, and to reclaim and restore those who err. (Heb. 12:5-12; Rev. 3:19; I Cor. 5:12; Gal. 6:1).

## **Administration of Discipline**

17. Any action is to be carried out in the spirit of Christian love and humility. It may involve anguish of heart and many tears. (II Cor. 2:4).
18. Matters of personal offence should be settled by members according to the procedure laid down in Matthew 18:15-18.

19. Any member who willfully neglects the responsibilities of church membership, who falls into doctrinal error or into open sin will be subject to the discipline of the church. Disciplinary action may take four forms according to the seriousness of the case:
  - a. Admonition and rebuke, either private or public
  - b. Suspension from the Lord's Supper.
  - c. Suspension from the privileges of church membership such as attendance at business meetings, leading meetings or teaching classes.
  - d. Exclusion from membership. If, after a reasonable length of time, there is no evidence of repentance the elders will recommend to the church that the offender's name be removed from the membership roll. (I Tim. 1:3).
20. The church should pray for the repentance and reconciliation of those under discipline. When restoration is made it may be appropriate for a testimony to be given to the church.
21. The church officers should encourage unity with other evangelical churches and the mutual recognition among the churches of Biblical procedures with regard to discipline so that these are not made of none effect to the dishonor of Christ.
22. In some cases of discipline great discretion is required and therefore the elders are not obliged to give the church all the details. At church meetings on these matters the elders will inform the church of their proposed action, and will invite members to approach them to gain further information or make their opinions known.

## **Termination of Membership**

23. Scripture recognizes disciplinary action or integration with another church or death as the only grounds for termination of church membership.
24. The list of members should be checked at least once a year. Those who have moved from the area should be encouraged to integrate with a local church.

## **Government**

25. The Lord Jesus Christ is the sole Lord over His Church. He governs His church by the word of God. His government is exercised in particular churches through the leadership of elders who have been set aside by the church to teach the Word of God and to lead the flock. (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1: 5-9; Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 5:1-5).
26. Deacons are appointed to care for the administrative and practical affairs of the church. (I Tim. 3:8-10).
27. A church, therefore, is comprised of a company of believers, who have chosen men as elders and deacons in order to rule and to serve. The officers and members commit themselves to each other in a loving and harmonious bond.
28. All elders and deacons must subscribe wholeheartedly to the 1689 London Confession of Faith, and to the constitution of the church.

## **Elders and Gifts**

29. The qualifications for eldership are set out in the Scriptures, particularly in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. These passages, which form the guide to recognizing elders, are to be read out and explained to the church whenever someone is being considered as an elder. If there are no elders then the deacons are to lead.
30. All elders rule and have the oversight of the local church. There should be mutual subjection among them and they should function together in harmony. However, it is recognized that all elders do not have the same gift and ability. Within the elders, one is to be recognized and set apart for the preaching ministry. Such a person must be manifestly gifted of the Holy Spirit to expound publicly the Scriptures.

## **Appointment of Elders**

31. It is the Holy Spirit who raises up and equips men with a variety of gifts and it is the responsibility of the church to recognize and encourage these. (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:7,11; Rom. 12:6,8; Acts 13:1-3; I Cor. 4:17).
32. The elders in particular should labor to prepare God's people for works of service. They should be watchful to encourage potential elders by recognizing those who have the necessary grace and abilities and who are already functioning in the use of their gifts. Such should be brought before the church for recognition. It may be necessary to call a pastor-teacher for the pulpit ministry from outside the church. This is a very serious and important matter and calls for earnest prayer from every member. It demands great vigilance on the part of the elders and deacons, and in this the elders are to guide. (Eph. 4:12).
33. From the date of this recommendation a period of one month will be left to allow time for any objections to be raised or questions asked, after which period another meeting of the church will be convened to consider the matter further and, if appropriate, to vote on the recommendation made by the elders.
34. The appointment of an elder shall be publicly ratified and he will be set aside for his duties by the prayer of the gathered church.
35. The church shall be responsible to provide for the support of the elder set aside for full-time work in the ministry. Provision should be made for his retirement. (I Tim. 5:17,18; I Cor. 9:9,14).
36. If an accusation against an elder is made, the directions of 1 Tim. 5:19,20 are to be followed. The other elders are to approach the matter with great caution, firmness and impartiality. (I Tim. 5:21).
37. The church officers are subject to the same discipline as outlined in 14 to 18 of the church constitution. If an elder falls into serious error or heresy he must be removed from office.
38. An elder unable to fulfill his commitments for legitimate reasons such as declining health and ability should relinquish his office. Such retirement must be ratified by vote at a meeting of the church.
39. An elder must not forsake the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made him an overseer, and so should not extend his activities without prior consultation with the eldership. If an elder is called to another sphere of labor this should be according to the goodwill and support of the church which should endorse his abilities for the same and not encourage ventures for which the appropriate gifts are lacking. (Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5; Acts 13:1-3).

## Functions of Elders

40. The function of elders is to exercise shepherd-like care over the church. This involves:
- a. giving themselves to prayer, the ministry of the Word and the nurture of souls;
  - b. regulating all gatherings for public worship;
  - c. interviewing applicants for membership;
  - d. maintaining discipline;
  - e. administering the ordinances and supervising admission to the Lord's Table;
  - f. recommending to the church additional elders or deacons;
  - g. leading and overseeing the church in all its ministries and functions, including local evangelism. (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2-4; II Tim. 4:2; Titus 2:1,5; I Tim. 3:8,14,15).

## Deacons

41. The qualifications for deacons are also laid down in the Scriptures, particularly in I Tim. 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-6. These passages are to be read out and explained to the church whenever someone is being considered for the office of a deacon.

## Appointment of Deacons

42. As with eldership, the ability to serve as a deacon is a gift of the Lord Jesus Christ to His church. Those who are to serve as deacons will be chosen from the men who display the necessary gifts and abilities. The elders have the responsibility of recognizing when the need arises for deacons to be appointed, and accordingly to make recommendations to the church. The procedure for appointment to this office is the same as that for eldership (31 to 32), as also is the procedure for removal from office (35 to 36). (Rom. 12:2,7; Eph. 4:12)

## Functions of Deacons

43. Deacons are called
- a. to relieve the elders so that they are able to fulfill their calling (see 38);
  - b. to a ministry of mercy toward those in physical need, especially any such within the church;
  - c. to administer the business and practical affairs of the church (all accounts are to be properly audited);
  - d. to maintain the church premises. (Acts 6:2-4).

## **The Ordinances**

44. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only two ordinances. (Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:41; I Cor. 11:23-26; Luke 22:19,20).
45. Baptism by immersion is to be administered only to those believers who are becoming members of the church or of some other gospel church.
46. The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated quarterly or as often as is considered advisable by the church. Those eligible to commune at the Lord's table are principally, though not exclusively, members of the church. Non members who desire to participate with the church in the breaking of bread must be of worthy reputation. Consultation with the elders must precede the invitation for non members to join in communion.

## **Business Meetings**

47. Where the church is gathered together in His name, the Lord is present. Therefore all meetings should be conducted in a spirit of worship and unity (Matt. 18:20).
48. The elders should summon the church for all matters of importance, such as considering the appointment of officers, the hearing of testimonies in support of applications for baptism and church membership, matters of discipline, the setting of doctrine, the organization of evangelism or the sending out of missionaries, and major practical matters.
49. The elders or church officers call all meetings of the church. They will give public notice at both Sunday services on the two Lord's days prior to the day fixed for the meeting, stating the business intended to be transacted at that meeting. They will also appoint a chairman for each meeting.
50. For all church meetings a quorum of 50% of the membership entitled to vote is required for a vote to be taken. No vote is to be received except the person be present.
51. Members are able to bring matters to the church but it is advisable first to take them to the church officers.
52. Every business meeting shall begin and end with prayer.
53. Meetings must be controlled by the chairman who should encourage the members to speak but once on the subject, unless they are required to explain the matter further.
54. All the business and activities of the church are to be reviewed at an Annual General Meeting. This is to be held as early as possible in the year, when all the financial accounts are to be presented to the church.
55. Some matters in the business meeting are confidential and when specified, members are not permitted to speak of these matters except to fellow members. Anyone breaking this trust will be liable to discipline.
56. While the meetings of the church are strictly private, the elders may allow others to hear the testimonies of applicants for membership.
57. An appointed secretary shall keep minutes of the meetings held. These minutes should be kept up to date.

58. When a vote is taken in the church, those entitled to vote are members who:
- a. have attained the age of sixteen (16) years, and
  - b. have been present at the communion of the Lord's Table at least once in the previous year prior to the meeting.
59. A two-thirds ( $2/3$ ) majority vote of the members present and entitled to vote at the meeting will be required to carry any motion. In special circumstances, such as the calling of a minister, the planting of a new work, a building program, or the support of a missionary, the membership may decide before voting to agree to a higher percentage to ensure solid support.
60. The provisions of this Constitution may be amended at any business meeting therein, duly called for the purpose, by a three fourths ( $3/4$ ) vote of the church (see 50).