



Immanuel

BAPTIST CHURCH

PROCLAIMING THE TRUTH IN LOVE

CONSTITUTION

**“LET ALL THINGS BE DONE DECENTLY AND IN ORDER.”
1 CORINTHIANS 14:40**

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THE CONSTITUTION

The Biblical Rationale For A Church Constitution

We believe the Scriptures call us to manifest both good faith and order as an assembly of God's people (Col. 2:5). Therefore, it is a responsibility given to us by Christ, as the head of this local church, (1) to declare what we believe the Scriptures to teach concerning the most important things which are surely believed among us (hence, the necessity for a statement of Faith, 1 Cor. 1:10), and (2) to declare what we believe the Scriptures to teach concerning our orderly life together (hence a constitution expressing our church polity which will govern our life together as God's people, 1 Tim. 3:15). This church constitution is to provide the framework and setting for us to fulfill the biblical mandate concerning an orderly church life as a fellowship of God's people (1 Cor. 14:33, 40; Matt. 28:18-20). This constitution is to provide these three general benefits:

1) Definition. This constitution defines our efforts to give obedience to the general biblical directives concerning church life and declares how we will conduct our life together as a people of God so as to fulfill those directives.

2) Predictability. This constitution states what we are to expect of one another; from both leaders and people.

3) Continuity. This constitution is a means to maintain the unity between what we believe and what we practice in our congregational life (2 John 8; 2 Pet. 1:13; 1 Tim. 3:14-16, 4:1-2). We realize that the church cannot, by legal documents and orthodox statements, prevent an assembly from drifting away from its statement of faith. May we seek a humble dependence upon the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20-27) to continue in our assembly the love of the truth, the spirit of the truth, and a pursuit of an accurate understanding of the truth as it is in Jesus (Eph. 4:17-24; 2 Thess. 2:9-12). We firmly believe that true Biblical orthodoxy can only be conserved by the Holy Spirit abiding in the consciousness of the individual members of this Church. We firmly believe that if our piety declines with our growth; if we begin to glory in numbers or appearance; if we admit to our communion simply well-behaved people, without a radical, spiritual change of heart, and are satisfied with a decent morality

only; if we are content with an outwardly reverential attendance upon Sunday worship, and do not insist on the new birth, the witness of the Spirit and the fruits in a holy life, this assembly will inevitably lose hold on the most vital Christian doctrines, and will tumble at length into the slough of liberalism and apostasy. It is our professed and humble desire that through the tender-mercies of our Great and Sovereign God, through the shepherding and regal care of Christ Jesus our Lord, and through the guiding, illuminating, and convicting work of our Holy Comforter that we avoid these evils.

Preamble

We, the members of Immanuel Baptist Church of Sacramento, California, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves as reflecting an orderly congregational life according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 10:31; 14:33, 40).

Article I - Name

We are, by God's grace, a congregation of the Lord's people, the sheep of His pasture, and as such, we have no other names or titles, but what have been given us by God (1 Cor. 1:2; Psalm 100:3); yet for the purpose of identification to the state and to mankind: The name of this church shall be Immanuel Baptist Church of Sacramento, California.

Article II - Authority, Government, and Affiliation

Section 1. Authority

We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23). We embrace the Holy Scriptures as the only final and binding authority given to us by Christ for all matters relating to faith and practice. (Isa. 8:20; John 8:31; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:1-4; 1 Tim. 6:3). This authority is binding upon every member of this church (Col. 2:5-10; 1 Tim. 1:3-11; 2 Thess. 3:6). This church is a theocracy which holds Christ to be our Sovereign and King, to whom all loving submission is due.

Section 2. Government

We believe that Christ, through the Holy Scriptures, directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen, and ordained, and submitted to by the

common suffrage of the membership according to the precepts of Holy Scripture (Acts 14:21-23; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 4:8-16; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17, 24). The elders themselves, at all times, and in all their activities, are subject to the authority of Holy Scripture (2 Cor. 1:24; 2:17; 4:1-5; 1 Cor. 4:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:19-21).

Section 3. Affiliation

The church may cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern (2 Cor. 8:18-24). We may seek the assistance (1 Cor. 16:1-2) and counsel (1 Thess. 1:7; 2:14) of other churches in matters of special concern to us (Acts 15), but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church (Acts 14:21-23; Phil. 4:15).

Article III - Purpose

Section 1

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures (Eph. 3:21) in promoting His worship (John 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:5); evangelizing sinners (Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 13 and 14; 1 Cor. 14:24-25; 1 Tim. 2:1-5 with 3:15); edifying saints (1 Cor. 14:12,18-19, 26; 1 Cor. 12:27-28; Eph. 4:11-16); spreading and strengthening the church (Acts 11:29-30; 15:3, 36, 41; 16:5); and showing benevolence to the needy (Rom. 15:26-27; Gal. 6:10). Therefore, we are committed to the proclamation through all the world of the whole counsel of God; his perfect, holy, just, and good law; the glorious Gospel of His grace (Luke 24:47; Acts 20:20-21, 27; Rom. 1:15-8:39); and to the defense of "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

Section 2

The primary methods and means for the accomplishment of this purpose are prayer and the public and private ministry of the Word of God. (Acts 6:4; 20:20; 2 Cor. 10:3-5; 1 Tim. 2:1-8 with 3:14-16 and 4:6, 13-15; 2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Article IV - Articles of Faith

Section 1

The Holy Scriptures are accepted as the only authority and statement of absolute truth. The Bible is the ultimate and final authority in all matters of faith, order, and morals. (Isa. 8:20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 4:1-2).

Section 2

The Holy Scriptures do expressly command and assume that the Church, in its local and visible expression, will define what the bible teaches concerning the most important things (2 Tim. 2:2; 1 Tim. 6:3; Titus 1:9; Rom. 6:17; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6; 1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Pet. 2:21; Jude 3; 1 Tim. 1:10; 2:7; 4:6, 13, 16; 6:1, 3; Rom. 16:17; Titus 1:9; 2 John 9-10); furthermore, it is essential to know what the Bible teaches upon those most important things in order to hold them, teach them, and defend them. Therefore, we do embrace and adopt, as the fullest expression of what the Bible teaches, the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 with some of the revisions made in 1989.

Article V - Covenant

Section 1. An Explanation of New Covenant Obedience

God has graciously entered into a covenant relation with His believing people (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1; Heb. 8:7-13; 10:16-17; 13:20-21). Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Covenant (Heb. 8:6). His blood is the blood of the New Covenant, which infallibly secures all the benefits of the covenant for all of God's people (Matt. 1:21-23; 26:26-28; Heb. 13:20-21). God has in this New Covenant made us members one of another (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:25). Therefore, we are to view our lives as being in covenant with God, and as believers, in covenant with one another. In this relationship, we have covenant responsibilities to each other as well as to God. God has promised, in this covenant, to write His laws in our hearts and to cause us to walk in his ways (Ezek. 11:19-20). The following sections summarize what we believe to be our covenant responsibilities to God, to one another, and to our fellow man.

Section 2. A Summary of God's Holy Law Written in Our Hearts:

1. The Sanctity of God. We agree to worship only the one true and living God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We will have no other gods before Him.
2. The Sanctity of God's Worship. We agree to worship God in His appointed way and to exclude from our worship anything that He has not appointed.
3. The Sanctity of God's Name. We agree not to use the name of our God emptily or to take it upon ourselves carelessly but to walk in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

4. The Sanctity of God's Day. We agree to cease from our own works on the Lord's Day, if they are not works of mercy, piety, or necessity, and to positively sanctify the day by special exercises of public and private worship.
5. The Sanctity of Authority. We agree to honor and obey, within the bounds of Scripture, all our superiors, whether in family, church, or civil life which includes both state and business; and, if we be superiors, to deal reasonably and lovingly with our subordinates and thus to teach them, by word and example, to fear God and keep his commandments.
6. The Sanctity of Life. We agree to avoid whatever tends to destroy us or our neighbors and to engage vigorously in all lawful endeavors to preserve our own lives and the lives of others, especially by ready reconciliation and faithful exhortation in the church.
7. The Sanctity of Sex. We agree to possess our bodies in holiness as vessels joined to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and to avoid all uncleanness of thought, speech, or action.
8. The Sanctity of Work. We agree to be diligent in our vocations, that we may provide for our own households; avoid theft of time, money, or goods; and so labor that we might have to give to him who has need.
9. The Sanctity of Truth. We agree to earnestly promote truth among men and to avoid anything that would prejudice the truth or injure our neighbor's good name.
10. The Sanctity of Our Lot in Life. We agree to be fully content with our own condition in life, to rejoice in the advancement of our neighbor, and to avoid envying him or coveting anything that is his.

Section 3. Our Church Covenant

Paragraph A. Introduction.

It is by the enabling of the Holy Spirit that we obey God's commands, in loving gratitude for Christ's righteousness, which has been imputed to us, and not to establish our own righteousness before God. We obey with the confidence that the end of Christ's death will be realized in us (that is, "that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us" [Rom. 8:4] and

that we should be a people "zealous of good works" [Titus 2:14]). As stated in the Confession of this church:

The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; and do willingly consent to walk together, according to the appointment of Christ; giving up themselves to the Lord, and one to another, by the will of God, in professed subjection to the ordinances of the Gospel (26.6)

We, the people of God, willingly submit ourselves in a spirit of obedience to Jesus Christ from a heart of love to Him, to His word, and to His people. The following covenant forms the basis for our giving and receiving instruction for ourselves and for our families, and serves as our church covenant to which we willingly subscribe.

Paragraph B. Covenant.

Having, as we trust, been brought by divine grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to give up ourselves to him, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith, in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, we do now, relying on His gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We will walk together in brotherly love, as becomes the members of a Christian church, exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other and faithfully admonish and entreat one another as occasion may require.

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others.

We will endeavor to bring up such as may at any time be under our care, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and by a pure and loving example to seek the salvation of our family and friends.

We will rejoice at each other's happiness and endeavor with tenderness and sympathy to bear each other's burdens and sorrows.

We will seek, by Divine aid, to live carefully in the world, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and remembering that, as we have been voluntarily buried by baptism and raised again from the symbolic grave, so there is on us a special obligation now to lead a new and holy life.

We will work together for the continuance of a faithful gospel ministry in this church, as we sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines. We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

We will, when we move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Article VI - Membership

Section 1. Definition of Terminology

We use the word "member" in the following ways: 1) to describe a believer united in heart to Christ and His people. He is so united by being a member of His mystical body, and, as a picture and expression of this, he is a member of a local body of believers, which is a physical representation of the mystical, spiritual body (1 Corinthians 12; Hebrews 10:24-25; 1 John 3:14-16; Ephesians 4:12-16). 2) We use the word "member" to describe that state of being "within," as opposed to being "without," or being outside a definite group of people designated as the "house of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:15). 3) We use the term "member" to indicate the soul over which the elders are placed by Christ and for whom the elders will give an account in the day of judgment (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17). 4) We use the term "members" to indicate those who have entered into a relationship of mutual covenant accountability with each other and with those who are office bearers (Mal. 3:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 5:4-13; Heb. 3:12-14; 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-5). Individuals will not be considered members who do not follow the procedures in Section 3.

Section 2. Requirements for Membership

Any man or woman (Acts 5:14; 8:3, 12) shall be eligible for membership in this church who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 24:47; Acts 2:37-42; 5:14; 8:12; 16:30-34; 20:21); who has been baptized upon the profession of his or her faith; who evidences a life transformed by the power of Christ making him or her a

new creation; who expresses substantial agreement with the Confession and Constitution of this church (1 Cor. 14:40; Eph. 4:31) as described in Article IV, sections 1 & 2; who intends to give wholehearted support to its ministry (1 Cor. 14:40; 2 Cor. 8:5; 1 Thess. 5:12-14; Acts 15:39); who is willing to submit to its government (1 Cor. 14:40; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 1:10; Heb. 13:7, 17) and discipline (Matt. 18:15-18; Acts 5:13-14). (Titus 1:16; Philippians 3:17-18; Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 4:3; Acts 20:21-32; 26:12-20; Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:18-22; 1 John 2:3-6; 3:10-15; 3:24-4:3).

Section 3. Procedures in the Reception of New Members

Paragraph A. A person who desires to become a member of this church, (that is, to be attached to this body as a fellow believer and disciple of Christ, walking with us in our earnest and sincere attempts toward obedience, holiness, order, and loyalty in and to Jesus Christ), shall apply to the elders and request to be interviewed by them. During the interview, the elders will seek to determine whether that person has a creditable profession of faith in Christ; has been scripturally baptized; is in substantial agreement with the Confession and Constitution of the church; is capable of assuming the responsibilities and liabilities of church membership; intends to give wholehearted support to its ministry; and is willing to submit to its government and discipline (Acts 9:26-27; 10:47-48 with 11:2-18; 11:23). We deem this step necessary in discerning the validity and intent of those who come in, that we might protect the flock against the many superficial professors and divisive wolves of our day, as well as to learn the souls of men and how we might serve them (Acts 20:17-31).

Paragraph B. If the applicant is, or has been, a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine the person's standing in that church and his reasons for leaving (Acts 15:1-2 with 24-25). If a former church raises an objection which the elders consider valid, the applicant may be denied membership at the discretion of the elders (3 John 8-10).

Paragraph C. If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership, they shall announce the same to the congregation at a stated meeting of the church. Time will be allowed (approximately four weeks) for objections or questions to be raised either privately with the elders or with the applicant by any member concerning the applicant's manner of life or doctrine. If no objection is raised which the elders consider to be valid, the person will be publicly received into

the membership at a stated meeting of the church, usually the next meeting for the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The elders may postpone the reception of a person into membership until proper investigation can be made concerning objections which, in their judgment, are sufficiently serious to warrant such a delay. (Acts 9:26-29).

Paragraph D. If the applicant's status of membership involves any abnormal circumstances, the elders will determine the appropriate action, subject to the approval of the congregation.

Section 4. Types of Membership

Each member of the church is acknowledged to form a vital part of the body and to have a particular function in the life of that body (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:25-27; Eph 4:16). There is no such biblical distinction as "active" or "inactive" member; all are to be Christians! (1 John 1:6; 2:3-6; 3:14-19). Practical considerations, however, require that certain distinctions be recognized in the membership of this church.

Paragraph A. Regular members. All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedures set forth in Section 3 of this Article; who continue in regular attendance at the stated meetings of the church; and who do not come under the corrective disciplines of the church as set forth in Article VII, shall be considered regular members in good standing and entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church. (Acts 2:37-47).

Paragraph B. Associate members. Regular members who providentially must move away from our area and who cannot find another local church with which they can conscientiously unite will, at their request, be retained as associate members of this church. Such persons must maintain regular communication with the church in order to maintain their associate membership in it. Nevertheless, they are urged to seek diligently a church with which they can unite elsewhere. An associate member shall not be allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church for obvious practical reasons. (Acts 8:27-40).

Paragraph C. Members under corrective discipline. When there is a member who characteristically walks in a disorderly way (contrary to conduct required of members, see Section 6), out of love and a desire to benefit the disorderly person, there shall be corrective discipline placed upon such a one according to Article VII.

Section 5. Termination of Membership

Paragraph A. Reasons for Termination.

1. By physical death. When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall automatically be removed from the membership roll. (Heb. 12:23).
2. By transfer. When it is so requested, the elders may grant to a departing member, in good standing, a letter of transfer to the fellowship of another church (Acts 18:27). No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church; rather, that church shall be notified of our action. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is, in their judgment, disloyal to "the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3) or which does not exercise godly care over its members.
3. By resignation. Membership in this church is entered and initiated jointly by voluntary commitment from the individual applicant and acceptance by the church, expressed in terms of the procedures described in Section 3. Accordingly, it follows that members cannot terminate their membership unilaterally under all circumstances. As a general rule, a member may voluntarily resign from membership peaceably, with stated reasons, and in an orderly manner. However, a resignation offered by a person guilty of sin, which calls for corrective discipline, is not valid, and the church may proceed with public censure, imposition of strictures, or excommunication in accordance with the procedures outlined in Article VII (Acts 15:24; 1 John 2:18-19 with 2 John 7-11). In the unlikely event a member ceases to attend the stated meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if upon relocation ceases to maintain a vital contact with the church, the elders shall diligently look into the matter and bring a recommendation to the congregation.
4. By excommunication. According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false and heretical doctrine, who blatantly and impenitently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or purity of the church (Matthew 18:15 ff; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is

set forth in the "Church Discipline" section of this Constitution Article VII.

Paragraph B. Implications of Termination.

1. This church does not exist in isolation from, but is part of, the universal church of Christ, composed of all true churches. Accordingly, open and forthright communication among the churches is vital for the purity, peace, edification and unity of the church universal. Therefore, the elders may, at their discretion, disclose to other evangelical leaders and churches the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated. (Acts 15:24; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:10).
2. In addition, this church does not exist in isolation from society at large. Accordingly, this church has a moral obligation to society both to act with integrity and to maintain its testimony (2 Cor. 8:20-21). Therefore, when they think it necessary, the elders may disclose to other persons, outside the ecclesiastical circles mentioned above, the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated. (Lev. 5:1; Prov. 29:24; 1 Pet. 4:15).
3. In addition, termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, spread false teachings or reports, or engage in any other behavior which threatens the peace and unity of this local church or of the church universal. Accordingly, when it is established that a former member is behaving divisively, the elders may issue whatever communications or warnings they deem appropriate to maintain and preserve the peace and harmony of this congregation and the church universal. (Acts 15:24; Romans 16:17-20; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14).

Section 6. Conduct Required of Members

When we speak of "the conduct required of members," it is essential to clearly define the phrase. Anything stated as "conduct required" is simply obedience to Christ and his Word; and as we state "what is required," we are simply drawing from Scripture what it presents as the evidence of a soul walking in subjection and obedience to the Authority of his Lord and Savior (1 Thess. 4:1-8; 1 Tim. 6:3; Phil. 3:17-4:1; 1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 1:6-7; 2:3-6).

When we speak of "the conduct required of members," these realities are understood:

1. The Reality of Remaining sin. In many things we all fail and each one struggles with remaining sin and corruption. Without Christ we can do nothing; but Christ does give Himself to His people to be their strength. Therefore, we should all walk in a humble dependence upon Him in the pattern of His life.
2. The Reality of Evangelical, Gracious Obedience. Obedience to Christ does not consist merely in doing the things which He requires! All true obedience to Christ proceeds from a real and sincere subjection of our souls and consciences to Him. We profess to be in this state by calling ourselves Christians and entering into His church.
3. The Reality of Love to Christ. That which invigorates, enlivens, and motivates this obedience is love (Deut. 6:5; 1 Corinthians 5:14-15; John 14:15, 21, 23-24; 15:9-14; Eph. 6:24; 1 Cor. 16:22-24). Christ states that obedience prompted by love is the foundation of all that is acceptable to Him. He will accept no obedience to His commands that does not proceed from love to His person. However, it must as well be stated that it is not true love which is not fruitful in obedience. There is, and ought to be in all believers a divine, gracious love to the person of Christ, immediately fixed on Him; whereby they are aroused, motivated and engaged in all their obedience to His authority.
4. The Reality of Our Mutual Need for Love Among The Brethren. It must as well be granted that sincere believers may struggle from time to time with the waning of this love and obedience to Christ. One of the benefits of a truly Christian body of believers is that there can be practical help extended to one another in such a condition. (Heb. 3:12-14; Gal. 6:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Col. 3:12-17).
5. The Reality of False Brethren. Sadly, it must as well be granted that there may be a false pretense of love to Christ. This pretense is ruinous to the souls of them in which it is found, and it often renders them prejudicial and troublesome to the flock of Christ. There has been and ever will be, in this world, hypocrites in the church: a false pretense of love is the essential ingredient of hypocrisy (Ephesians 6:24; Psalm 18:44; Philippians 3:18-19; Titus 1:16; Jude 3-4, 12-19).

6. The Reality of Our Need of a Plan for the Health and Success of Christ's Church. Finally, insomuch as the life and health of the church, out of love to Christ, is to be of tender concern to all believers, practical ways and means of promoting this are provided throughout the Scriptures. Some of these are:
 - a. The pursuit of a regenerate membership. (1 Corinthians 5:12-13; Acts 5:13-14).
 - b. The establishment of the office of the elder, overseer, pastor, or teacher. (Ephesians 4:8-16; Hebrews 13:7, 17, 24).
 - c. The care of the brethren. (Hebrews 3:12-14; Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1; Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Peter 5:5).
 - d. The standard of conduct. (Galatians 6:16; Philippians 3:16 19; 2 Thessalonians 3:6 9; Romans 16:17 18). The standard of conduct to which we willingly submit ourselves is described in Article V.

Article VII – Church Discipline

Section 1. Formative Discipline

Every disciple (learner and follower) of Christ must be under His discipline (His instruction and correction), which is administered to each one, both personally (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:30-32; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 2:22-23) and through the church, (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Eph. 4:11-15; Gal. 6:1; 1 Thess. 5:14; Heb. 3:12-14; 12:15). Mutual submission to one another and to the overseers whom the Lord has set over His church (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5) will, under the blessing of God, result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when formative discipline alone is insufficient, and corrective discipline becomes necessary.

Section 2. Corrective Discipline

Paragraph A. General Statement. Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. As a general rule and whenever feasible, an effort must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles

given to us in Matthew 18:15-16; Romans 16:17-20, 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:19-20, and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and appropriately applied to each and every case of corrective discipline. In some cases, public admonition may be warranted (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20). In other cases, some of the privileges of membership may need to be suspended and appropriate strictures imposed (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). In the most extreme cases excommunication from the membership of the church may be necessary. (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Tim. 1:20; Titus 3:10) Since the church is a spiritual and religious institution, the punishments inflicted by the church in corrective discipline (2 Cor. 2:6-7) are also spiritual. They include public, verbal reproof, (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20), social avoidance (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14), and withdrawal of distinctive Christian fellowship (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13; 2 John 10), and are intended to effect repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame (2 Cor. 2:7; 2 Thess. 3:14). 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 delivered to the civil authorities according to the rule of Scripture (1 Pet. 4:15). The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6) and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 1:20).

Paragraph B. Public Reproof or Censure. Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort, before the gathered church, to call an impenitent church member or church members to repentance for sin too serious to be covered with a blanket of love. The elders may administer public censure whenever, in their judgment, either public misconduct (Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Tim. 5:20), patterns of sin (Titus 1:12-13), or serious doctrinal error (Titus 1:10-13) pose a significant threat to the godliness, unity or testimony of the congregation. Those who humbly receive the word of public reproof, own and confess their sin, and manifest a transformed life (Prov. 28:13) shall afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance (2 Cor. 7:7-11). If the reproof is not heeded, further discipline may be imposed.

Paragraph C. Suspension of Privileges. Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness and testimony of the church that the Lord requires public reproof to be accompanied by the suspension of some or all of the privileges of membership appropriate to the nature and gravity of the offense (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). In all cases of suspension, the offending person is still to be regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church, and not as a wicked man cut off from distinctly Christian fellowship (Matt. 18:17-18; 2 Thess.

3:15). In addition, the Lord wills that this severe reproof be expressed (Matt. 18:17) and enforced (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:6-15) by the entire church. Therefore, in accordance with the procedures outlined below for each of the five major categories of offenses, the elders shall recommended to the congregation, at a regular or specially called congregational meeting, that the offending brother be suspended, specifying the grounds for the discipline, the privileges to be revoked and the strictures to be imposed. A member under suspension shall be treated by the congregation according to the specific applications of the general principle of social avoidance (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15) determined by the elders. Those who humbly submit to the imposed discipline [and show real evidence of a change of heart, conduct or belief] shall afterwards be forgiven, have their privileges restored, and be publicly received back into the full fellowship of the church (Matt. 18:15; 2 Cor. 2:5-11). The general grounds and generic categories of sin which require suspension are as follows:

1. A Stubborn Private Offender (Matt. 18:15-17). When a private offense remains unresolved even after the method prescribed by our Lord in Matt. 18:15-16 has been graciously and prayerfully followed, it is considered an aggravated offense. The brethren involved shall bring the matter to the elders who, if they judge the matter to be serious enough and cannot persuade the brother to repent, shall report the situation to the church, and recommend that the stubborn brother be suspended. (Matt. 18:17a) If, even after suspension, the person remains adamant in his sin, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph D of this article (Matt. 18:17b).

2. Divisive Teachings or Behavior (Rom. 16:17-20; Titus 3:10). When a member deliberately persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to Scripture and our confession, or attempts to sow discord among us, contrary to Scripture and this constitution, he may be suspended as a factious man. Since every member is responsible to help preserve the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1ff), none of us is to conceal such divisive behavior, but rather to reprove it and disclose it to the elders (Deut. 13:6ff; 1 Cor. 1:10-11). Whenever the elders become aware of divisive behavior, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (1 Cor. 1:10-4:21; Titus 3:10). If, even after receiving repeated admonition from the elders, a member persists in such behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the divisive brother be suspended. If, even after the suspension, the person remains adamant in sowing discord or in spreading serious doctrinal errors, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph D of this article.

3. Disorderly Behavior (2 Thess. 3:6-15). When a member deliberately persists in conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for either the order appointed by God for all mankind in the creation ordinances, namely, work and Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3, 15; Ex. 20:8-11; 2 Thess. 3:6-15) and marriage (Gen. 2:18-24; 1 Cor. 7:1-17, 39; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 2:5); or for the order established by Christ for his church in Scripture (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 1 Cor. 14:37-40; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; Titus 1:5) and adapted to our congregation in this constitution, he may be suspended as a disorderly man (2 Thess. 3:6). Whenever the elders become aware that, in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline (1 Thess. 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (2 Thess. 3:10-12). If, even after receiving such admonition from the elders, a member persists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the disorderly brother be suspended (2 Thess. 3:14-15). If, even after the suspension, the person remains adamant in disorderliness, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph D of this article.

4. A Scandalous Sin. If a member has sinned scandalously but shows signs of repentance, including submission to the admonition of the elders, it would be wrong to excommunicate him. It may still be necessary, however, to suspend him for a time from some of the privileges of membership, lest reproach be brought upon the name of Christ and the church (2 Sam. 12:14; Rom. 2:214); lest others be emboldened to sin (1 Tim. 5:20); and lest the offender himself fail to test his own soul and realize the gravity of his offense (Heb. 3:12-14).

Paragraph D. Excommunication.

1. For Moral Matters. Some types of conduct must be categorized as "immoral" (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 6:9-10). A member blatantly and impenitently guilty of such conduct must be cut off from the fellowship of the church (1 Cor. 5:3-5, 13; Matt. 18:17). In such a case the elders shall make earnest efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation, but if these efforts fail, they shall report the same to the congregation at a regular, specially-called, business meeting of the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated - which must be done, according to Scripture (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4), by action of the entire church. To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of at least two thirds of the members present and voting.

2. For Doctrinal Matters. Likewise, some wrong opinions regarding the doctrines of Scripture are so serious that they must be categorized as "heretical" (Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 4:1), and a member who persists in propagating or holding any such opinion, in spite of earnest and patient admonition by the elders, shall be excommunicated in the same manner as an immoral person.

Article VIII - Baptism and The Lord's Supper

Section 1. General Statement

There are two ordinances of special significance which our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (These are sometimes referred to as "sacraments". For out of all Christ's ordinances these two alone are established by Christ (1) to be an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, (2) as well as pictures or symbols of Christ's great gospel accomplishments.) Neither of them has saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of Baptism or the bread and the cup of the Supper. These ordinances are not means of "special grace", but they are "special means of grace" and powerful aids to the faith of the believers who participate in them.

Section 2. Baptism

Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for Baptism, and all such persons should be baptized (Acts 2:28). Believing that Baptism is the God-ordained door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, we shall receive into the membership of the church only those who have been baptized in the biblical manner, which is by immersion and "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

Section 3. The Lord's Supper

Whereas Baptism is the initiatory ordinance by which one enters the visible church and should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1 Corinthians 11:26). While this is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity, the bread and the cup of the Supper are, and remain, only symbols of the broken Body and the shed Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper shall, under normal circumstances, be celebrated by the church on the first Lord's Day of each month.

Article IX - Church Officers

Section 1. The General Concept of Church Officers

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of the church (Colossians 1:18), and he governs His church through office bearers whom He appoints (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11), and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work (1 Cor. 15:9-10). Because Christ appoints church officers, they both have authority (2 Cor. 13:10) and their authority is limited by Him in the Scriptures (1 Cor. 14:36-38; 12 John 9). There are two kinds of church officers, elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). Elders are also called "bishops" (meaning "overseers") because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). These are also the "pastors and teachers" given to the church "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). Elders only function (according to the will of Christ) as an extension of the heart and hand of Christ, overseeing His flock committed to their charge (Acts 20:28). Deacons are authoritative servants who carry out the desires of the elders. They only function (according to the will of Christ) as they are an extension of the heart and hands of the elders. The deacons exist to protect the elders from being distracted from prayer, the ministry of the Word of God, and the oversight of the flock of Christ. While the elders are a ruling body of men; the deacons are not. It is the duty of the church to seek and discover among its members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for office bearing (Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:1-8; Titus 1:5-9), and, after formally recognizing them by common consent and suffrage (Acts 6:5-6; 14:21-22), to set them apart by united prayer (Acts 6:6; 13:1-3) and then to submit to their authority (Luke 10:16; John 13:20; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:5). Church officers are not exempt from church discipline, but contrariwise, their office obliges them to a more rigorous standard of conduct than regular members (James 3:1). This general concept of church officers is defined in greater detail in the sections which follow.

Section 2. The Authority of Church Officers

Paragraph A. The Ground of Their Authority: The Scriptures. The head of the church (Col. 1:18), through his apostles (Eph. 2:20; 1 John 4:6), has given unto his church the Scriptures, as an infallible and unchanging rule of practice (Matt. 20:28; 1 Cor. 7:17; Col. 4:16; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:14; 1 Tim. 3:14-15), unto which all church officers are always bound. (1 Cor. 14:36-38) Where the Scriptures give explicit or implicit direction to the

church on a topic, this direction is never to be contravened. When no such word from Christ is given, church officers are subject to the general principles of Scripture and to the light and order displayed in creation. (1 Cor. 11:13-14; 14:40)

Paragraph B. The Limits of Their Authority. The Word of God defines the limits and boundaries of the authority of church officers and of the congregation. The eldership, as a body, (Acts 20:17-35; 1 Pet. 5:1-2), is authorized and responsible to give comprehensive oversight to the church, including: the preaching and teaching of the whole counsel and gospel of God (Acts 20:20-21, 27; Titus 1:9); the watching out for the welfare of the soul of every member of the church (Eph. 4:11-16; Col. 1:28; 1 Thess. 2:11; Heb. 13:17); and the directing of the church in all its tasks by setting general policy and by making specific decisions (1 Tim. 3:4-5; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). Nonetheless, the elders must always exercise this authority with sensitivity to the needs of the congregation (Ezek. 34:4; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:7) in the posture of servants and examples to the congregation (Matt. 20:25-28; 1 Pet. 5:3). Therefore, the elders should seek the advice and support of the congregation respecting any large project or expenditure and should be willing to yield to the congregation when appropriate (Acts 19:30; 21:11-14). Furthermore, the Lord has ordained that congregational approval or suffrage is mandatory in two important matters, the recognition of church officers (Acts 6:1ff; 14:21-23) and the exercise of public discipline (1 Cor. 5:4-5; 2 Thess. 3:14). Congregational approval is defined for recognition of officers in this article, Section 5, Paragraph B (2), and for church discipline in Article VII, Section 2, Paragraphs C and D.

Section 3. The Office of Elder

Paragraph A. Plurality of Elders. Although in new or small congregations only one man may have the gifts requisite to his being recognized as an elder, the Scriptures indicate that, normally, there should be a plurality of elders in the local church (Acts 20:17; Philippians 1:1). The church should endeavor, therefore, to discover, and then formally to recognize, all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite gifts and graces, but only such men. In the unlikely event that the church ceases to have a plurality of elders, the church should seek the assistance and counsel of other churches, who are of like faith and practice and who have a normal plurality of elders, to assist in matters peculiar to the abnormal single eldership.

Paragraph B. Parity and Diversity of Elders. The elders are all equal in office and authority but diverse in gift and function. 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. Elders are usually referred to as pastors for they all share the pastoral responsibility. Since the responsibilities of this office are numerous and grave, it is highly desirable that at least one elder should devote himself, full-time, to the work of the ministry and the oversight of the church.

Paragraph C. Elders Laboring in the Word. The church is responsible to give adequate financial support to elders devoting their full time to the ministry because they "labor in the word and teaching" (1 Timothy 5:17). In addition the church is also (1 Corinthians 9:9-11; 1 Tim. 5:17-18) free to invite men from outside the local congregation to come into its midst to labor in the word and teaching both temporarily as need arises and for consideration by the flock for a permanent calling after they have lived and served in the midst of the church and shown themselves to be the gift of Christ for this assembly.

Paragraph D. Number of Elders and Length of Term. Whereas the church should endeavor to recognize all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite gifts and graces, the number of the elders shall not be fixed. These may all continue in office as long as they remain qualified, able, and willing to serve. Wherefore, neither shall the length of their term of office be fixed by the church.

Paragraph E. Qualifications of Elders. The general qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of elder are clearly set forth in Scripture, particularly in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Any man called to this office must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with the Articles of Faith and the Constitution of the church. Should he at any time move from this position, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this fact known to the church [at the discretion of his fellow elders.]

Section 4. Deacons

Paragraph A. The Task of Deacons. Deacons are responsible to administer the ordinary business, secular affairs, and benevolent concerns of the church so that the elders may devote themselves, without distraction, to the more spiritual matters (Acts 6:3-4). Deacons must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and subjection to the elders.

Paragraph B. The Number of Deacons and Length of Term. The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having the scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:3). Neither shall the length of their term of office be fixed by the congregation.

Paragraph C. Qualifications of Deacons. The qualifications for a man chosen to fulfill the office of deacon are particularly set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Any man called to this office must be able, conscientiously, to affirm his agreement with the Articles of Faith and the Constitution of the church. Should he at any time move from this position, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this fact known to the elders and then to the church at the discretion of the elders.

Section 5. The Recognition, Installation, and Confirmation of Church Officers

Paragraph A. The Task of Recognition. The local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, is responsible to appoint men to the offices of elder and deacon. Each individual involved should have an inward conviction that the Lord is calling him to the particular office; and the church should recognize that call as it observes evidence in the individual of the gifts and graces which Scripture requires for the particular office. This is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayerful waiting on God for guidance, a careful perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and an objective evaluation of each man nominated to a particular office. These activities are the responsibility of each individual member of the church as well as of the church as a whole. (Acts 6:1-6; 14:21-23)

Paragraph B. The Process of Recognition. The recognition of officers occurs through nominations and congregational approval.

1. Nominations. Nominations to the office of elder or deacon may be made at anytime by a member to the elders or by the elders themselves. After prayerful consideration of all potential office bearers the elders shall place in nomination as many or as few men as they see fit. The elders may at anytime during the year call a special congregational business meeting for their consideration. In no case may a man be nominated to either office without his knowledge and prior consent.

2. Congregational Approval. When the time comes to consider a nomination during a business meeting of the church, the candidate for office and any members of his immediate family who are present shall be requested to leave the room while his qualifications are openly discussed by the entire congregation in the fear of God and the light of Scripture. Any negative concerns should have already been expressed to the person nominated and to the elders. The fact that the persons are placed before the congregation for vote assumes that all negative concerns, if any, have been resolved. After that, a written ballot shall be taken. It is hoped that the vote of the congregation will, in such matters, always be unanimous, but if [in the unlikely event] unanimity is not realized, no less than a three-fourths majority of the members present and voting shall be required for the election of an office-bearer.

Paragraph C. Installation. Following the recognition of an office-bearer by vote of the congregation, he shall be publicly installed in his office at a regular worship service by the prayer of the whole church and the laying on of the hands of the existing elders.

Paragraph D. Confirmation. Office-bearers are subject to the same rules of discipline as are other members of the church. They shall hold office as long as they are faithful to their calling and have the confidence of the congregation. The church shall reconfirm (or express the withdrawal of) its confidence in each of its office-bearers at its annual meeting four years following the date of his installation and every four years thereafter in the manner designated in Paragraph B, (2) of this section.

Section 6. The Discipline and Resignation of Church Officers

Paragraph A. The Warrant for the Discipline of Officers. While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves, members of the flock. Therefore, each elder, as an individual, is under the oversight of his fellow elder(s) and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church. Church officers are subject not only to the same rules of discipline as the other members, but in addition are subject to public reprimand by the elders (Gal. 2:14; 1 Tim. 5:20) and/or removal from office (1 Tim. 3:1), if they no longer are qualified for their office or if their behavior is disorderly or scandalous, thereby bringing reproach to Christ and the church and setting the stumbling block of a bad example before the brethren.

Paragraph B. The Procedure for the Discipline of Officers. The process of discipline may be initiated either by the elders or by individual members of the congregation. Any member who is offended at the behavior of any church officer should first approach that officer privately and express his or her concerns. If the concerns are not resolved, the member should inform the elders of the situation and wait upon them in their determination of the matter (Matt. 18:15ff). Since this is such a delicate and serious matter, the elders shall proceed with due caution and earnest prayer (1 Tim. 5:19). If the elders judge discipline to be necessary, they shall inform the congregation of the basis for the proposed discipline. If he so desires, the officer accused shall have an opportunity to speak in his own defense. The removal of an officer shall require congregational approval at a duly called congregational meeting. In order to retain his office in such circumstances, the officer must receive a vote of confidence by no less than a three-fourths majority of the members present and voting. It is agreed that a single eldership is an abnormal condition and, as such, calls for special measures when a conflict arises between the single elder and a member or members of the congregation. As in a plurality, any member who is offended at the behavior of the elder should first approach the elder privately and express his or her concerns as directed by Matthew 18:15ff. However, before the matter is brought before the church, the following procedure should be followed in order to protect the vulnerability of the single elder, safeguard the office (1 Tim. 5:19), and provide for that elder that which every member of the church enjoys: the protection and care of a pastor(s). The elder and the offended church member(s) shall together seek the assistance and counsel of other churches of like faith and practice with a normal plurality of elders, (The Confession of Faith, chapter 26), to hear the matter and prescribe the manner and the extent to which the church ought to be informed and the procedure for the resolution of the issue. Under no circumstances is an accusation against an elder to be brought before the congregation without first pursuing this course of action. In a circumstance such as perceived here, the church shall draw up a resolution to put into effect the provisions of this paragraph without fully disclosing the substance of the dispute or accusation to the congregation. This assistance and counsel shall be sought via letter approved by a two-thirds majority vote at a duly called business meeting as described in Article XI. Once the council has reached its conclusion, the church shall give serious attention to the judgment, and insofar as the decision is seen to be good and biblical counsel, resolve to submit to it.

Paragraph C. The Resignation of Officers. An officer may, however, resign his office without prejudice if for good and valid reasons he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of it.

Article X - Official Board

In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Matt. 22:21), this church shall have a Board of Officers. This board shall consist of Pastors (Elders) as voting members and Deacons as non-voting members. Officers of the board shall serve as the legal representatives of the church.

Article XI - Congregational Business Meetings

Section 1. General Statement

There shall be an annual business meeting of the church for the hearing of reports, the election of officers, and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the congregation. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

Paragraph A. Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at regular worship services. A minimum of seven days notice shall be given for any meeting at which official church business is to be conducted. However, in the case of an emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each regular member by mail or verbal contact of the time, place, and the purpose of the meeting.

Paragraph B. Meetings for the hearing of special reports or for seeking the counsel of the congregation may be called on shorter notice, but no vote may be taken or other business transacted at such meetings.

Section 2. Quorum

The regular members [(as described in Article VI, Section 4, Paragraph A)] present at any properly convened congregational meeting shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Section 3. Voting

The Scriptures indicate that the congregation is involved in a voting context in two circumstances: the recognition and confirmation of church officers (Acts 6:1-7; 14:21-23), and the exercise of church discipline where excommunication is exercised (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13). All regular members, who are in good standing, may vote on either of these

matters when brought before the congregation, according to the directions given in Article IX, Section 5, Paragraph B. Unanimity of heart and mind under God shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realized, not less than a three fourths majority of the members present and voting shall be required to make a resolution valid.

Article XII - Amendments

This constitution may be amended as the elders deem it necessary. Such amendments shall be presented to the congregation at a duly convened business meeting of the congregation where due discussion may take place or the mind of the congregation sought.



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