

THE CONSTITUTION OF
COVENANT REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH
Bluefield, WV

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ADOPTED MAY 23, 1998
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
COVENANT	3
ARTICLE 1, IDENTIFICATION	4
SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT	
SECTION 2. OUR ESSENTIAL DISTINCTIVES	
SECTION 3. PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES FOR OUR PERPETUATION	
SECTION 4. OUR CONSUMMATION AS A CHURCH	
ARTICLE 2, MEMBERSHIP	6
SECTION 1. THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP	
SECTION 2. ELIGIBILITY FOR MEMBERS	
SECTION 3. TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP	
SECTION 4. PROCEDURES IN THE RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS	
SECTION 5. CONDUCT REQUIRED OF MEMBERS	
SECTION 6. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP	
ARTICLE 3, CHURCH DISCIPLINE	11
SECTION 1. FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE	
SECTION 2. CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE	
ARTICLE 4, CHURCH OFFICERS	12
SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT	
SECTION 2. GENERAL PREREQUISITES	
SECTION 3. ELDERS	
SECTION 4. DEACONS	
SECTION 5. THE RECOGNITION, INSTALLATION, AND CONFIRMATION OF CHURCH OFFICERS	
SECTION 6. THE DISCIPLINE OF CHURCH OFFICERS	
SECTION 7. TERMINATION OF OFFICE	
SECTION 8. BOARD OF DIRECTORS	
ARTICLE 5, ORDINANCES OF WORSHIP	17
SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT	
SECTION 2. THE POLITY OF BAPTISM	
SECTION 3. THE POLITY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER	
ARTICLE 6, CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS	17
SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT	
SECTION 2. NOTICE OF MEETINGS	
SECTION 3. QUORUM	
SECTION 4. CHAIRMANSHIP	
SECTION 5. VOTING	
ARTICLE 7, INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS	18
SECTION 1. AUTONOMY	
SECTION 2. COOPERATION	
SECTION 3. MUTUAL CARE	
ARTICLE 8, CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY	18
SECTION 1. NATURE	
SECTION 2. DEFICIENCIES	
SECTION 3. AMENDMENTS	

Foreword

The congregation which is presently known as Covenant Reformed Baptist Church began with the desires of families in the Bluefield area to see a biblical local church established. While some of the families participated in meetings in the 1980's, the present group had its first meeting together in April of 1994. Shortly thereafter the families prayerfully considered taking steps which could lead to the formation of a church holding to the 1689 London Confession of Faith — a Reformed Baptist Church. In May 1994, the group began holding Wednesday meetings, adopting the name Covenant Baptist Fellowship. In April 1995 Covenant Baptist Fellowship requested oversight from a church in North Carolina, which resulted in the commencement of Sunday evening services in May 1995 and regular Lord's Day morning and evening services beginning October 8, 1995. During the years of waiting the diverse group which formed Covenant Baptist Fellowship grew in unity and love for the brethren. On May 23, 1998 the patient prayers of these families were answered when they constituted as Covenant Reformed Baptist Church of Bluefield.

The reason for having a church constitution is borne out of the conviction that the local church is the house of the living God and that the affairs of that house must be carefully ordered in keeping with the explicit statements and general principles of God's will inerrantly revealed in the Holy Scriptures (I Tim. 3:15). One concrete reflection of this conviction can be seen in the numerous Scripture references incorporated in the constitution as the basis of its contents. We entreat the members and friends of this church family to study this document with the kind of spirit which belonged to the Bereans who received Paul's teaching and then diligently examined the Scripture to verify its accuracy. Our most earnest desire is to bring no will except the will of Christ to bear upon the order and government of this church.

The adoption of a constitution by a congregation brings upon each member of it the weighty responsibility to conduct himself in a manner which upholds the integrity of the constitution and of his commitment to the congregation holding that constitution. With that awareness, coupled with the keen recognition that this is at best a fallible, man-written document, we implore the all-wise and immutable God to protect this church from error and to bring it more and more into a better understanding of His infallible Word.

Covenant

God has graciously entered into a covenant relationship with His believing people (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; 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. 26:26-28; Heb. 13:20-21). God has in this New Covenant made us members one of another (Rom. 12:4-5; I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:25). Therefore, 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 (that is, to enable us to keep our covenant responsibilities). The motivation and ability to obey God's laws spring from the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who, by His death, satisfied the holy wrath of God that was against us due to our sins, and who, by His resurrection, ever lives to make intercession for us (Rom. 4:25). It is by the enablement of the Holy Spirit that we obey 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. 8:1-4) and that we should be a people "zealous of good works" (Titus 2:14)]. In light of these gracious realities, we the members of the Covenant Reformed Baptist Church of Bluefield do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

Article 1 Identification

SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT

A true Christian church as a divine institution, separate from the family and the state, is a definite group of Christ's disciples, distinguished by: a) being an ecclesiastical organization constituted by their solemn mutual commitment to Christ and the Scriptures; b) being a spiritual organism, enlivened by Christ's special presence with them through the Holy Spirit Who constitutes them as a true temple and house of God (I Cor. 3:16-17; I Tim. 3:15; Rev. 2:5).

This article identifies our existence as an ecclesiastical institution. Our essential distinctives as an ecclesiastical institution are defined in Section 2. The principles and procedures necessary to our perpetuation as an ecclesiastical institution, with these distinctives, are specified in Section 3. Our ultimate hope for our glorious consummation as an ecclesiastical institution, along with the reluctant directives for an untimely consummation, are specified in Section 4.

SECTION 2. OUR ESSENTIAL DISTINCTIVES

Our essential distinctives, which are each defined in the following paragraphs are: Our Name, Our Purpose, Our Doctrinal Commitment, Our Polity Commitment, Our Civil Commitment.

Paragraph 1. Our Name

The official name of this ecclesiastical institution (hereafter referred to as "church") is the Covenant Reformed Baptist Church of Bluefield.

Paragraph 2. Our Purpose

Generally stated, the purpose and design of the Covenant Reformed Baptist Church of Bluefield is to walk together in ecclesiastical life and practice so as to be and do everything Christ in the Scriptures wills for a local church, whether respecting our existence as an institution, our membership, our leadership, our commission, our order, our assemblies, or our associations.

More specifically, our purpose should be understood as consisting of the following: a) the maintenance of the public worship of God according to the directives of His Word (John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3); b) the feeding, nurturing, and protecting of the flock of God collectively and individually by the careful teaching of God's Word, the loving pastoral oversight of the members, and the mutual communion of the members in spiritual fellowship according to biblical directives (I Pet. 5:2; II Tim. 3:15-16; Jude 3-4; Heb. 13:17; Acts 20:28-31; Heb. 3:12-14); c) the proclamation of Gospel truth to the world with the zealous effort to make Christ known in His true glory and to seek the salvation of perishing humanity (Matt. 28:18-20; Phil. 1:12-21; Acts 17:22-31).

Paragraph 3. Our Doctrinal Commitment

The ultimate authority in all matters of faith, order, and morals is and must be the Bible alone, which truth is clearly set forth in our Confession. However, in the face of doctrinal confusion, controversy, and human weakness, it is necessary for the church to set forth its understanding of the Bible on primary matters of faith and practice. Thus, we adopt as our articles of faith and doctrinal statement the London Confession of Faith of 1689. This historic document, though a human document and therefore not inerrant, is an excellent summary of "the things most surely believed among us" (Luke 1:1) and we find it to be an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. Any exceptions in our adherence to this Confession do not detract from our adoption of all of its essential doctrinal distinctives as reformed and baptistic.

Paragraph 4. Our Polity Commitment

Our commitment as a church to a common polity is defined in this Constitution. We have no secret, unwritten commitment in addition to this Constitution.

1) The Authority of Our Polity Commitment—The Bible alone is absolutely binding upon our consciences, as our final and ultimate authority in all ecclesiastical matters. Yet, it is proper and necessary for any organization to set forth clearly what its purposes are and the principles by which those purposes will be pursued. The reasons for this are as follows: a) it promotes harmony and cooperation founded upon righteous order; b) it provides defense against misunderstanding on the part of those outside who question the principles by which the church operates. Therefore, we are committed and bound to follow this Constitution conscientiously. We are never at liberty to violate it at whim, or to ignore its provisions and requirements, lest we be brought to confusion and chaos, for God is not the author of confusion but of peace (I Cor. 14:33). Therefore also, any actions taken in violation of its statements, provisions and requirements are not valid acts of this church.

2) The Interpretation of Our Polity Commitment—From time to time questions may arise as to whether an action, contemplated or taken, is in accord with this Constitution, or in violation of it. In such cases the elders shall attempt to resolve the matter privately to the satisfaction of all concerned. If they are unable to do so the question

shall be resolved by congregational suffrage as a matter of corporate church business at a specially called congregational meeting for that purpose.

3) The Revision and Amendment of Our Polity Commitment—Since this Constitution is the product of fallible men, living in a changing world, we may desire from time to time to revise or amend it. This process should be undertaken cautiously, and prayerfully, never precipitously. Therefore any proposed revision or amendment must be distributed to the congregation in written form at least one month prior to its public consideration and adoption. And, since this process of revision recommendation concerns the entire church, the Constitution may only be amended by a three-fourths majority of the members present and voting at a duly convened business meeting of the congregation. Any future amendments to this Constitution shall be listed in writing at the conclusion of this Constitution, and subsequently published along with it as part of our polity commitment.

Paragraph 5. Our Civil Commitment

In order to comply with the laws of the state, and thereby “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Matt. 22:21), this church may have a Board of Trustees or Directors, as is needed, to serve as legal representatives. Article 4, Section 8 identifies the members of any such Board.

SECTION 3. PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES FOR OUR PERPETUATION

Paragraph 1. The General Foundation of Church Perpetuity

Christ has willed and insured that His church universal be perpetuated in every generation until His return (Matt. 16:18; Eph. 3:21), not through natural bloodlines and the physical procreation of the children of church members (Matt. 3:7-9; Rom. 9:6-8), but through the success of the Gospel, spiritual birth, and true conversion of the spiritual children of Christ and of the church (Acts 2:47; 5:13-14; Is. 53:10; 59:20-21; Rom. 9:6-8; Gal. 3:29). Although no particular church has a promise from Christ of age-long perpetuation, each church should strive to avoid dishonorable discharge from Christ’s service and kingdom through gross sin and apostasy, and His subsequent repudiation of them as a temple of His Spirit (Rev. 2:5).

Paragraph 2. The Perpetuation We Desire

Our concern is to preserve both the essential elements of our ecclesiastical substance and identity; namely, our congregational purpose and indwelling with the Holy Spirit and our distinctive identity and heritage as a Reformed Baptist church, embodied in our Confession and in this Constitution.

Paragraph 3. Procedures for Our Preservation as a True Church

1) The Preservation of God’s Special Presence With Us—Since our corporate indwelling with the Holy Spirit is essential to our being a true church, if we are to remain a true church, we must not so grieve and quench the Spirit of God by corporate rebellion that Christ will repudiate us and take Him from us (Rev. 2:5). To this end, the elders shall be responsible for providing the following helps to the church: a) periodic instruction and reminders to the congregation respecting grieving the Holy Spirit and the benefits of the Holy Spirit’s presence; b) special emphases in corporate prayer meetings concerning thankfulness to God for that measure of His presence we have enjoyed, confession of our known sins, pleading with God for light and grace as to any corporate sins of which we are ignorant and blind, the resolution of any outstanding grievances among the members, grace to put away anything which would grieve the Spirit of God; c) specially called prayer meetings to invoke God’s mercy, grace, and help in times of peculiar spiritual or physical distress.

2) The Preservation of Our Distinctive Ecclesiastical Identity—Since preservation of our ecclesiastical purpose is also essential to our continuation as a true church, we must take care lest we forget what we are designed to be and to do as an organization. The elders shall therefore make provision for the comprehensive instruction of the entire congregation regarding our corporate purpose. In addition, prior to each annual meeting, the elders, with the advice of the congregation, shall formally review our life and ministries in order to insure that we have been acting in accord with our purpose, and in order to address any necessary corrections or proposed improvements. The elders shall report the substantial findings of the review to the congregation at the Annual Meeting. Furthermore, in order to achieve our perseverance in our distinctive ecclesiastical identity, we hereby commit ourselves to transmit our heritage, embodied in our Confession and this Constitution, unimpaired to succeeding generations of our spiritual children, God willing, until Christ returns. To this end, each member of the church shall be furnished with a copy of our Confession and Constitution. Each member is expected to read through each of them annually, prior to the Annual Meeting. Also, the elders will make provision for regular instruction of the congregation as to our confessional heritage. Awareness and instruction alone, however, will never suffice to transmit our heritage unimpaired. Constant vigilance and open, unashamed affirmation on a regular basis are essential. Without these, the things we now hold dear will someday be matters of indifference, and then someday will be lost altogether. Therefore, each member shall affirm in writing his or her commitment to our Confession and Constitution at the time this Constitution is adopted. These written affirmations will be kept in our church records. Subsequent re-affirmations shall be made every other year henceforward on even calendar

years. Any member or church officer unwilling to re-affirm his commitment to the Confession and Constitution shall be excluded from membership and congregational consent shall not be required.

SECTION 4. OUR CONSUMMATION AS A CHURCH

Our hope and prayer is that Covenant Reformed Baptist Church will continue alive and faithful as a true church of Jesus Christ with our distinctive identity and heritage intact, until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Yet, if in God's providence this church must dissolve and disband prior to Christ's return, this section is intended to provide for that dissolution in a decent and orderly manner, in the fear of Christ.

Paragraph 1. The Grounds of Dissolution

The grounds for the dissolution of this church prior to the coming of Christ are: a) if it were no longer physically capable of pursuing its purpose due to providential dwindling through dearth of conversions, scattering by persecution, or other such circumstances; b) if it were no longer willing to remain committed to the distinctives of our doctrinal heritage as defined in our Confession.

Paragraph 2. The Procedures for Dissolution

Should such grounds as named above exist, the elders, or other remaining leadership, shall propose to the congregation the pursuit of dissolution. Congregational approval of such a proposal, at a duly called congregational meeting for that purpose, is necessary for the dissolution process to begin. Upon congregational approval of the leadership's recommendation to pursue dissolution, the congregation shall decide on the receiver or receivers of its assets, make arrangements for, and actually dispose of the same within the guidelines defined in the following section of this paragraph. The last act of the congregation shall be to acknowledge and certify that all its assets have been disposed as specified herein. The dissolution shall proceed within these guidelines, which shall not be violated. All assets are to be disposed, and all just debts paid. No member is to take possession of any assets or profit from their liquidation. The disposition of all assets, or the proceeds from their liquidation, shall be given to a church or churches holding to our doctrinal distinctives. In the unlikely event that no such Reformed Baptist church or churches exists, our assets shall be given to an evangelical Presbyterian church, holding to the Westminster Standards. If no evangelical, Reformed churches Baptist or Presbyterian exist, let them then be distributed to spread the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, by giving them to an evangelical, orthodox church of Jesus Christ, which we know shall exist somewhere according to God's promise until Christ returns (Matt. 16:18).

Article 2

Membership

SECTION 1. THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

Our Confession speaks (Chapter 26, Paragraph 12) of the fact that whereas all believers are bound to join themselves to particular churches, they are by joining a particular church admitted unto the privileges of that church. Some of the privileges and benefits of membership are: a) the context of public worship which enables them to worship God according to His command (John. 4:23-24; I Pet. 2:4-5); b) preaching which is wholly true, instructive, spiritually useful unto repentance, faith, and edification unto sanctification (II Tim. 4:2-5; Titus 2:1-15); c) pastoral oversight and counsel suited to their individual spiritual needs (I Thess. 2:7, 10-12; 5:12; Heb. 13:17); d) fellowship with God's people so as to receive the helps of their love and spiritual gifts and benevolence (I Cor. 12:18-27; Eph. 4:11-16; Gal. 6:10); e) protection against damning heresies and corrupting sins through the corrective discipline of the church (I Cor. 5:1-13; Acts 20:28-30; Rom. 16:17); f) the Biblical context for fulfilling the Great Commission to evangelize the world (Matt. 28:18-20); g) an active participation in our corporate life by voting according to the stipulations of Article 6, Section 5; h) and generally, the due supply of the appointed means of grace necessary unto final perseverance to glory (Heb. 3:12-14; 6:11-12).

SECTION 2. ELIGIBILITY FOR MEMBERS

All persons who, in the discernment of the elders, are capable of mature, independent judgment as appears sufficient to obey the Gospel and participate in the broad responsibilities of membership, may apply for membership. Such persons shall be eligible for membership as they profess repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:37-42; 5:14; 8:12; 16:30-34; 20:21), manifest a life transformed by the power of Christ (I Cor. 1:1-2 with 6:11; Gal. 1:1-2 with 4:8-9; I Thess. 1:1-9), are baptized upon professed faith in Christ (Matt. 20:18-20; John. 4:1-2; Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:31-34; 18:8), express substantial agreement with the Confession and Constitution of this church (i.e., agreement which satisfies the elders that there is likemindedness in the doctrines essential to orthodox, reformed Christianity and to the biblical order of this church) (I Cor. 1:10; 14:40; II

Cor. 8:5; I Thess. 5:12-14; Acts 15:39) and are willing to submit to its government (I Cor. 14:40; Acts 2:42; I Cor. 1:10; Heb. 13:17) and discipline (Matt. 18:15-18; Acts 5:13-14).

SECTION 3. TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

Each member of the church is acknowledged to form a vital part of the body and to have a special function in the life of that body (I Cor. 12:4-27). Practical considerations, however, require that certain distinctions be recognized in the membership of this church.

Paragraph 1. Regular Members

All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedures set forth in Section 4 of this article whose membership has not been terminated in any of the ways specified in Section 6 of this article and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church as set forth in Article 3, 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 2. Temporary Members

Persons who come to live in our area for a limited period of time (e.g., students, military personnel, persons on special work assignments) may be received into or removed from the membership of the church on the same basis and in the same manner as persons who have permanent residence in our geographical area. If such a person is already a member of a church in his place of permanent residence, he need not be released from the membership of his "home church" but will be regarded as a temporary member while in our midst, enjoying all the privileges and benefits and subject to all the duties and discipline of regular membership. When such a person terminates his period of temporary residence, he will be released to the fellowship of his "home church" and no longer be regarded as a member of this church (compare: Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1-2; II Cor. 3:1f; Col. 4:10; III John. 5-10).

Paragraph 3. Non-resident Members

Regular members who 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 non-resident members of this church. Such persons must maintain regular communication with the elders in order to maintain their non-resident membership in it. Nevertheless, they are urged to seek diligently a church with which they can unite elsewhere. A non-resident member shall not be allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church. At the discretion of the elders, non-resident membership may also be granted to invalids and others whose providential situation prevents expected regular attendance at meetings of the church (Acts 8:27-40 general principles).

SECTION 4. PROCEDURES IN THE RECEPTION OF NEW MEMBERS

The Scriptural pattern for the reception of new members into the church includes not only careful scrutiny, consisting of pastoral examination and investigation, but also congregational suffrage, consisting of their advice and consent.

The requirement of pastoral scrutiny is rooted and grounded in the general Scriptural teachings respecting oversight (Acts 20:28), discernment (I Cor. 3:1-3), and discretion (I Tim. 5:3-16, 22) and in the apostolic pattern of making disciples (Acts 8:14-22). The requirement of congregational advice and consent is rooted and grounded in the general Scriptural teachings respecting proving (I Thess. 5:21; I Tim. 3:10) and congregational unity (I Cor. 1:10; Rom. 16:17) and in the apostolic pattern of congregational suffrage (Acts 14:23; 15:22).

Paragraph 1. Pastoral Examination

A person who desires to become a member of the church 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 credible 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, 23). Each applicant will be required to affirm in writing his or her commitment to our Confession and Constitution.

Paragraph 2. Pastoral Investigation

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). A letter of commendation will be requested from that church. If a former church raises an objection which the elders consider valid (III John. 8-12), the applicant may be denied membership at the discretion of the elders.

Paragraph 3. Congregational Advice

If the elders are satisfied that the applicant is eligible for membership, they will present the applicant to the congregation at a stated meeting of the church for the purpose of hearing the applicant's testimony of faith in Christ. Following this, a time period of no less than one month will be allowed for objections or questions to be raised privately with the elders by any member concerning the applicant's manner of life or doctrine. The elders shall postpone the reception of a person into membership until any objections are investigated and resolved to their satisfaction (Acts 9:26-28; Rev. 2:2). If there are no unresolved objections, approximately one month following the public testimony, the applicant will be presented before the church for congregational suffrage. Approval by congregational vote as specified in Article 6, Section 5 will result in the applicant's immediate reception into membership.

SECTION 5. CONDUCT REQUIRED OF MEMBERS

The Scriptures, as reflected by our Confession (Chapter 26, Paragraph 5b-6), declare that all church members are to be saints (Rom. 1:7, et al.) who demonstrate the grace that is in them by walking "together in particular societies, or churches, for their mutual edification, and the due performance of that public worship, which He requireth of them in the world." The privilege of being a member of the visible church of Christ brings with it high responsibilities to walk worthy of the Gospel and to contribute to the health and peace of the church (Eph. 4:16; Phil. 1:27). These responsibilities in summary are as follows:

Paragraph 1. Attendance at Stated Meetings

Members are required to attend all the meetings of the Lord's Day unless providentially hindered (by illness, accident, unusual working conditions, and other such circumstances). Members are also expected to be in attendance at the midweek prayer service and any special meetings called by the elders for prayer, preaching, or business. (Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:24-25)

Paragraph 2. Financial Support

Since it is clearly taught in Scripture that Christians should support financially the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate giving made through the local church (Malachi 3:8-10; I Cor. 16:1-2; II Cor. 8-9), all the members of this church are expected to conform to this rule of Scripture. The tithe (10% of the total of one's income) is strongly urged upon each member as an expression of worship and the biblical norm for basic giving, to which should be added gifts and offerings according to one's ability and the willingness of his heart (II Cor. 8:1-5; Exodus 36:2-7).

Paragraph 3. Promotion of Edification and Peace

Inasmuch as the church is represented in Scripture as a body having many members, each of the members having its particular function and yet having a concern for the health and protection of the whole (I Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:4, 11-16), this church expects that each of its members will strive for the good of the entire body. The members must actively seek to cultivate acquaintance with one another; love, comfort, and encourage one another; and help one another materially as necessity may require (Eph. 4:25; Gal. 6:10; I John 3:16-18). In addition, members must discreetly confess their sins to one another (James 5:16), faithfully admonish and encourage one another (Matt. 18:15f; I Thess. 5:14; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25), refrain from all backbiting and gossip (Ps. 15:3; Prov. 16:28; 26:20-22), and keep in strict confidence all matters which the elders determine are of private concern to the church (Prov. 11:13).

Paragraph 4. Support of and Submission to the Leadership

All who come into membership of this church are expected to support and submit to the overseers of the church. Supporting God's servants necessitates praying for them and their labors (Eph. 6:18-19); cultivating personal acquaintance with them, and esteeming them highly for their work's sake (I Thess. 5:12-13); standing by them and not forsaking them in their afflictions and in all their good causes (II Tim. 1:15); and defending rather than prejudicing or damaging their good name (Acts 23:5; I Tim. 5:19).

Submitting to God's servants necessitates imitating their Christian graces, faith, and godly principles as they also imitate Christ (I Cor. 11:1; Heb. 13:7; I Peter 5:3); receiving their teaching with all readiness of mind and teachableness of spirit, yet with ultimate allegiance to the Word of God (Acts 17:11; James 1:19-21; I Thess. 2:13); humbly heeding their scriptural rebukes and warnings as from those appointed to watch for the souls of their sheep and committed to labor to present them complete and mature in Christ (Heb. 13:17; Col. 1:28); seeking and carefully considering their counsel as from those counted faithful by the Lord (I Cor 7:1,25); and cheerfully embracing and abiding by their decisions regarding corporate policy in God's house, which is His church (I Tim 3:5,15; Heb. 13:17), without negation and murmuring even when personally differing with their judgment (Rom. 10:21; I Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:14; Jude 11).

Paragraph 5. A Godly Christian Life

All who come into the membership of this church are expected to walk worthily of the Lord, that His Name and Word be not blasphemed but rather His excellencies be displayed through us, and that the good name of the church be not damaged but rather enhanced (Col. 1:10; I Peter 2:9). Therefore every member is expected to practice and cultivate godliness in the following areas:

1) Personal Devotion to God—Each member is expected to walk personally with the Lord, making regular use of all the private means of grace available to him, including: daily secret prayer (Matt. 6:6,10; Ps. 55:17; 88:9; Dan. 6:10); daily reading and meditating on God's Word (Ps.1:2; 119:11,97); continual maintenance of a good conscience with judgment day honesty (Acts 24:16; I Tim. 1:19; Heb. 10:22; 13:18); periodic and wholesome self-examination, prayerfully conducted by the standard of God's Word (Ps. 139:23-24; II Cor. 13:5; II Pet. 1:10-11; I John 5:13); and careful, spiritual observance of the Lord's Day Sabbath (Gen. 2:1-3; Ex. 20:8-11; Is. 58:13-14; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10).

2) Family Life—The church expects its members to obey the teachings of the Scriptures with respect to family life and government of the home. As the God-appointed head of the family, the husband must rule over the household with gentleness and love, but also with wisdom and firmness (Eph. 5:25f; I Tim. 3:4-5). The wife must be in subjection to her husband in all things according to the rule of Scripture (Eph. 5:22-24; I Peter 3:1). The husband with the wife must "nurture their children in the chastening and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:1-4), by setting a godly example before them, by leading them in family worship, by instructing them consistently in the Scriptures, (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 6:7,9), by praying for them (I Chron. 29:19) and by wise and firm discipline, including corporal punishment when it is needed (Prov. 13:24; 22:15; Heb. 12:7).

3) Personal Evangelism—It is the duty of every Christian individually and as a member of a local church to pray and labor according to his God-given ability and opportunity (Rom. 12:6) for the extension of the kingdom of God both at home and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 general principle). Therefore, every member of this church is expected to seek to recognize and to seize opportunities to bear witness to his faith in Christ both by consistent Christian conduct and by the testimony of his lips (Matt. 10:32-33; Rom. 1:16-17; 9:1-3; 10:1; Phil. 2:14-16; I Pet. 3:14-16).

4) Christian Liberty—Each member of the church is required to render in his daily life loyal obedience to all the moral precepts established in the Word of God (Rom. 8:3-4). If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in His Word, a Christian is at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God and to glorify Him in all things (I Pet. 1:17; I Cor. 10:31), a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren (I Cor. 8:9; Rom. 15:1-3), a compassion for the lost (I Cor. 9:19-22), and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul (Rom. 13:14; I Pet. 2:16).

5) Separation From the World—God never intended the glorious blessing of Christian liberty which His people enjoy to become an excuse or covering for worldliness (Gal. 5:13; I Pet. 2:16). To the contrary, Christians have been liberated from bondage to their former sins in order that they might be a people distinct from this wicked world and set apart unto God (Lev. 18:1-30; Titus 2:11-14; I Pet. 1:14-15). Accordingly, Christ's disciples are commanded not to love the world (Ps. 139:19-22; James 4:4; I John 2:15), to refrain from their former worldly attitudes and deeds, (Eph. 4:17-22; 5:7-12; Titus 2:12; 3:3; I Peter 4:3-4), and to resist the wicked influence of godless society (Prov. 1:10-19; Rom. 12:1-2; James 1:27). Therefore, all the members of this church are expected to separate from the attitudes, practices and unwholesome influences of the world. Specifically, members are expected to resist the worldly materialism which regards the things of this life to be of primary importance (Mk. 8:36; Luke 12:15; I John 2:15-17). Members are expected not to indulge in any of the world's vices, such as drunkenness, drug abuse, gluttony, viewing pornographic materials, fornication, homosexuality and other such sins (I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21). Members are also expected to refrain from all entangling relationships with the ungodly, such as intimate, frequent companionship with them (I Cor. 15:33; James 4:4), pursuing romantic interests in them (Judges 16:4-5; I Kings 11:1-4,9; Prov. 2:16-17; 6:20,23-25), and contracting marriages with them (II Cor. 6:14; I Cor. 7:39). Similarly, members are expected carefully to seek to discern and resist any wicked influence of the godless society upon their souls and families, by whatever means it is exerted (Rom. 12:1-2).

SECTION 6. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

Paragraph 1. Means of Termination

1) By Physical Death—When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall be removed from the membership roll (Heb.12:23).

2) By Removal to Another Church—The New Testament norm for Christians is that they be members of true local churches of Christ, and the spiritual health of believers is endangered when they are not thus committed

to a church; therefore, any Christian who leaves the membership of this church should seek to do so by means of removal to another true church of Christ. If a church member in good standing whose conduct does not warrant corrective discipline desires to leave the membership of this church, he is strongly urged to leave in an orderly way by privately indicating that desire to the elders along with his reasons for leaving. When it is so requested, the elders may grant to a departing member in good standing a letter of commendation to 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. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of commendation 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 Covenant Reformed Baptist 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 4 of this article. Accordingly, it follows that members cannot terminate their membership unilaterally under some circumstances. As a general rule, a member may voluntarily resign from membership in Covenant Reformed Baptist Church. In such cases a member should first consult with the elders. 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 6 (Acts 15:24; I John 2:18-19 with II John 7-11).

4) By Dismissal—If 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, he may be dismissed from the membership at the discretion of the elders (I John 2:19 general principle). In such cases the elders shall try to contact the person and resolve the situation (Ezek. 34:4). If these efforts are ineffective, the elders shall inform that person when feasible and the congregation that he is no longer a member. If a member not guilty of sin which calls for corrective discipline either renounces his public commitment to keep all the requirements of membership listed in Section 2 or Section 5 of this article (Num. 30:2; Deut. 23:21-23; Ps. 15:4; 24:4; Matt. 5:37), or ceases without just cause to practice all of them as a pattern of life (Ps. 76:1 with II Tim. 2:19; Eccl. 5:1-5; Matt. 21:28-31 general principle; 23:3 general principle), and yet refuses to resign voluntarily, he may be dismissed, but only after due admonition from the elders (II Tim. 2:24-26). In such cases the elders, at a regular or specially called congregational meeting, shall recommend to the congregation that the person be dismissed, explain the grounds for their recommendation, and obtain the consent of the congregation. No person shall be dismissed in such cases without this expressed consent of the congregation. The person shall be informed of this action.

5) By Excommunication—According to the teaching of Holy Scripture a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and membership any person who teaches or insists on holding 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, peace, or purity of the church (Matt. 18:15f; Rom. 16:17-20; I Cor. 5:1f; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Section 2 of Article 3 of the Constitution.

Paragraph 2. Implications of Termination

1) Covenant Reformed Baptist Church does not exist in isolation from, but is part of the universal church of Christ, composed of all true churches (Gal. 1:13,22; Eph. 3:21). 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 the members of Covenant Reformed Baptist Church and to other churches the circumstances under which a person’s membership was terminated (Acts 15:4; I Tim. 1:20; II 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 (II Cor. 8:20-21). Therefore, the elders may, at their discretion, 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; I Pet. 4:15).

3) Termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, spread false teachings or slanders, or engage in any other behavior which threatens the peace and unity of this church or the church universal. Accordingly, when it is established that a former member is behaving divisively, the elders may issue whatever warnings they deem appropriate to maintain and preserve the peace and harmony of this congregation and the universal church (Acts 15:24; Rom. 16:17-20; I Tim. 1:20; II Tim. 17; 4:14).

Article 3

Church Discipline

SECTION 1. FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE

Every disciple (follower) of Christ must be under His discipline (His instruction and correction), which is administered primarily to each one through the church (Matt. 28:18-20; I Cor. 12:12-27; I Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Formative discipline, with its many aspects, will result in the sanctification of each member

individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when one's failure to respond to this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

SECTION 2. CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE

Paragraph 1. General Statement

1) Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral, or scandalous conduct appears in a member 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 (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles given to us in Matt.18:15-16, Rom. 16:17-20, I Cor. 5:1-13, II Thess. 3:6-15, I Tim. 5:19-20, and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and applied to each case of corrective discipline as appropriate. In some cases public admonition and/or public repentance may be warranted (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17-20; I Cor. 5:1-15; I Tim.1:20; Titus 3:10). All the members of the church are obliged to submit to and enforce as appropriate the decision of the church in acts of corrective discipline.

2) Since the church is a spiritual and religious institution, the punishments inflicted by the church in corrective discipline are also spiritual (II Cor. 6:7;10:1-6; John.18:36). They include public verbal reproof (Matt.18:17; I Tim. 5:20), social avoidance (Rom.16:17; I Cor.5:9-11; II Thess. 3:6,14), suspension from the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 5:11), and removal from the membership of the church (Matt.18:17, I Cor.5:13). They are intended to effect repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame (II Cor.2:7; II 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 (Rom. 13:1-5; I Peter 4:15).

3) The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (I Cor. 5:6-7) and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender (I Cor. 5:5; II Cor. 2:5-8; I Tim. 5:20).

Paragraph 2. Public Reproof or Censure

Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort, before the gathered church, to call an impenitent church member to repentance for sin too blatant to be dealt with in an exclusively private manner; or to deal with serious sin even where there may have been repentance. The elders may administer public censure whenever in their judgment either public misconduct (Gal. 2:11-14; I 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) will afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance (II Cor. 7:7-11). If the reproof is not heeded, further discipline may be imposed.

Paragraph 3. Suspension

Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness and testimony of the church that the Lord requires the suspension of some of the privileges of membership (Rom. 16:17-20; II Thess. 3:6-15). 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. Therefore, in accordance with the procedures outlined below for each of the five major categories of offenses, the elders shall at a business meeting of the church recommend that the offending member be suspended, specifying the grounds for their recommendation. To be valid, an act of suspension must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, the elders shall have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension upon a member which will bar him from not more than one Lord's Table while they deliberate the most prudent course of action. The major 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 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 a period of suspension, the person remains adamant in his sin, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph 4 of this Section (Matt. 18:17b).

2) Divisive Teaching or Behavior (Rom. 16:17-20; Titus 3:10)—When after admonition a member persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to the Scripture and our Confession of Faith, or attempts to sow discord among the membership contrary to the Scripture and this Constitution, that person may be suspended as factious. Since every member is responsible to help preserve the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1f), no member is to conceal such flagrantly divisive behavior, but rather to reprove it, and disclose it to the elders (Deut. 13:6-11; I Cor. 1:10-11). Whenever the elders become aware of such divisive behavior, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (I 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 a period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph 4 of this Section.

3) Disorderly Behavior (II 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, Sabbath, and marriage (Gen. 2:1-3,15,18-24; Exod. 20:8-11; I Cor. 7:1-17,39; II Thess. 3:6-15; I Tim. 5:8; Titus 2:5); or for the order established by Christ for His church in Scripture (I Cor. 11:17-34; 14:37-40; I Tim. 3:14, 15) and adapted to our church in this Constitution, he may be suspended as a disorderly person (II Thess. 3:6). Whenever the elders become aware that, in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline (I Thess. 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (II Thess. 3:14-15). 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 (II Thess. 3:14-15). If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication shall be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph 4 of this Section.

4) A Scandalous Sin—If a member has sinned scandalously but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the elders, it may still be prudent to suspend him for a time so that he may clearly manifest repentance (Matt. 3:8), so that reproach not be brought upon the Name of Christ and the church (II Sam. 12:14; Rom. 2:24), and so that others may not be emboldened to sin (I Tim. 5:20). If fruits worthy of repentance are not forthcoming, the elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph 4 of this Section.

5) Contempt of Church Discipline—If a person is accused or suspected of a sin requiring corrective discipline, yet absents himself from the meetings of the church, or refuses to meet with the elders so that the matter may be investigated, such a person may be suspended (Matt. 18:17; Num. 16:12, 20, 27). The elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Paragraph 4 of this section.

Paragraph 4. Excommunication

1) In addition to the excommunication of those who have been previously suspended, some expressions of sin (ethical or doctrinal) are so gross and heinous in nature that preliminary actions like public reproof and suspension are inappropriate. In such cases, the guilty member may be immediately excommunicated by the church (I Cor. 5:1-5). This severe measure is to be employed when aggravated lawlessness is discovered, and there are no hopeful signs of repentance. This severe measure is designed to purge the lawbreaker of his lethal attachment to his sin, unto a sincere and enduring repentance (I Cor. 5:5; 6:9-11). The elders, therefore, having made earnest but unsuccessful efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation, shall report the same to the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated.

2) All acts of excommunication must be executed by the gathered church (Matt. 18:17; I Cor. 5:4). To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of at least three fourths of the members present and voting.

Article 4

Church Officers

SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT

Jesus Christ alone is Head of the church (Col. 1:18), and He governs His church through officers whom He appoints (Acts 20:28; Eph. 4:11) and who are endowed by His Spirit with the graces and gifts needed to accomplish their work (I Cor. 15:9-10). Because Christ appoints church officers, they have authority (II Cor. 13:10) and their authority is limited by Him in the Scriptures (I Cor. 14:36-38; III John 9). There are two kinds of church officers, elders and deacons (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:1-13). Beside these two offices the Scriptures acknowledge no office which continues in the church today (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:1-13). Elders are called: “bishops” (meaning “overseers”) because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly (Acts 20:28; I Pet. 5:2); “pastors” because they shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28); and “rulers” because they govern and care for the house of God (I Tim. 3:4; Heb. 13:17,24).

It is the duty of the church to seek and discover among its members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary graces and gifts for office-bearing (Acts 6:3), and after formally recognizing them by common suffrage (Acts 6:5-6), to set them apart by united prayer (Acts 6:6), and then to submit to their authority (Lk. 10:16; John. 13:20; Heb. 13:17; I Pet. 5:5).

SECTION 2. GENERAL PREREQUISITES

1. All officers of this church must be members of it except as provided in Section 3, Paragraph 2.

2. Any individual set apart to one of these offices must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with the church's Confession of Faith and Constitution. If he should at any time move from this position, he would be under spiritual and moral obligation immediately to make that fact known to the elders in an orderly manner.

3. While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given women and the valuable assistance they may render to the officers of the church (Rom. 16:1-6; Phil. 4:3; I Tim. 3:11), the Bible prohibits women from holding either the office of deacon or elder in the church (I Cor. 14:33b-35; I Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7). Women, therefore, shall not be nominated, elected, or ordained to either of these offices in the church. It is also contrary to Scripture for any woman to exercise headship or leadership in a formal meeting of the whole church either by leading in prayer, conducting the worship, reading the Scripture, leading the singing, administering the sacraments, or ministering the Word of God (I Cor. 14:33b-35; I Tim. 2:8-15). Since it is also a violation of the Scriptures for a woman to exercise authority over a man in spiritual things outside a meeting of the whole church, no woman shall be appointed to a teaching or authoritative function in a ministry of the church where adult men would be regularly under her ministry. Nevertheless, we acknowledge and encourage the valuable gifts and assistance of women: in the formal instruction of children and other women (Titus 2:3-5), in edifying conversation with women and men (I Cor. 11:5; Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:1-4; I Tim. 5:9-10) and in assisting the deacons with the diaconal and especially the benevolent ministries of the church.

SECTION 3. ELDERS

Paragraph 1. The Authority of the Eldership

1) The Ground of Their Authority: The Scriptures—The Head of the church (Col. 1:18), through His apostles (Eph. 2:20; I John. 4:6), has given to His church the Scriptures as an infallible and unchanging rule of practice (Matt. 20:28; I Cor. 7:17; Col. 4:16; II Thess. 2:15; 3:14; I Tim. 3:14-15), unto which all church officers are always bound (I Cor. 14:36-38). Where the Scriptures give explicit or implicit direction to the church on a topic, this direction is never to be negated or contradicted. When no regulative word from Christ is given, church officers are subject to the general principles of Scripture and to the light and order displayed in creation (I Cor. 11:13-14; 14:40).

2) 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 is authorized and responsible to give comprehensive oversight to the church (Acts 20:17-35; I Peter 5:1-2), including the preaching and teaching of the whole counsel 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; I 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 (I Tim. 3:4-5; Heb. 13:17; I Peter 5:1-2). Nonetheless, the elders must exercise this authority with sensitivity to the consensus of the congregation (Ezek. 34:4; I Tim. 3:4-5; I Pet. 3:7) in the posture of servants and examples to the congregation (Matt. 20:25-28; I Pet. 5:3). Therefore, the elders should seek the advice and support of the congregation respecting any major endeavor or large 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 the recognition and confirmation of church officers (Acts 6:1f; 14:21-23) and the exercise of the most serious acts of church discipline, namely suspension and excommunication (I Cor. 5:4-5; II Thess. 3:14). Congregational approval is defined for recognition and confirmation of officers in this article, Section 5, Paragraph 2.

In addition, congregational approval is necessary for any change of this Constitution. That approval is defined in Article 1.

Finally, congregational advice and consent is necessary for the reception and exclusion of members. The process for obtaining congregational advice and consent is defined for the reception of members in Article 2 and for exclusion from membership in Article 3.

Paragraph 2. Plurality of Elders

1) The Scriptures clearly teach that there should be a plurality of elders in each local church (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5). Therefore, the church should endeavor to discover and then formally to recognize all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite graces and gifts, but only such men.

2) Absence of a Plurality of Elders—This Constitution assumes, and the norms of biblical church order require, that a plurality of elders oversee this local church. (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5). Therefore, if there does not exist a plurality of elders in office; and this lack cannot in a timely way be supplied, the remaining elder (or the deacons, if there are no elders) shall seek the temporary oversight of the pastors of a trusted sister church holding as its doctrinal standard the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. (See Article 7, Section 3.) The purposes of such an arrangement are to provide pastoral care and leadership in the recognition of the norm of a plurality of elders.

When an eldership meeting this requirement and willing to undertake these responsibilities is located, the church shall within a reasonable period of time officially place itself under this eldership. If the church has a remaining elder, this eldership shall function as his fellow elders. This action shall be taken by a written ballot at a properly called meeting of the church. A three-quarters majority of those present and voting is necessary for such an action. The recognition of the oversight of such an eldership shall be confirmed (or failing a three quarters majority withdrawn) in the same way at the annual meeting of the church in succeeding years. When a plurality of resident elders is raised up, the oversight arrangement here described, which is admittedly abnormal, shall immediately cease.

Paragraph 3. The Parity and Diversity of Elders

The elders are all equal in office and authority (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17), but diverse in gift and function. Each elder must be “able to teach” and be engaged in private instruction and admonition and in the administration and government of the church (Acts 20:28; I Tim. 5:17). However, some will be more experienced, involved, and proficient than others in executing various dimensions of the pastoral office, and in view of the God-given diversity of gift, some should be more engaged in formal and public preaching and teaching than others (I Tim. 5:17). In view of this diversity of gift as well as the numerous and grave responsibilities of the office, 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 as his calling in life. The church is responsible to give adequate financial support to elders who labor in the Word, while others of the elders fulfill the office as they maintain an ordinary vocation (Acts 18:3-5; I Cor. 9:9-11; I Tim 5:17-18).

Paragraph 4. The Number of Elders and Length of Term

Though a plurality of elders is the New Testament norm for every church, the New Testament does not specify the number of elders each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an elder’s term of office. One truly called to this office is usually called to it for life. He is a gift of Christ to the church, and the gifts of God are without repentance (Rom. 11:29). Only when an elder fails to meet the necessary qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from being an elder.

Paragraph 5. The Qualification of Elders

Anyone considered for the office of an elder must evidence to God’s people the personal, domestic, and ministerial qualifications that are set forth in the Scriptures (I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Any man called to this office must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with our Confession 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.

SECTION 4. DEACONS

Paragraph 1. The Duties 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). They must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and subjection to the elders (Acts 11:30).

Paragraph 2. 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 3. The Qualifications of Deacons

The qualifications for a man chosen to fulfill the office of deacon are particularly set forth in Acts 6:3 and I Tim. 3:8-13. Any man called to this office must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with our Confession 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.

SECTION 5. THE RECOGNITION, INSTALLATION, AND CONFIRMATION OF CHURCH OFFICERS

Paragraph 1. The Task of Recognition

The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, He has ordained that each local church exercise the responsibility of recognizing those whom He is appointing to be elders and deacons in that particular church. The number of elders is based on the gift of Christ (Eph. 4:11), while the number of deacons is based on the needs of the church and the existence of the qualified men (Acts 6:1-4). Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (I Tim. 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (I Tim. 5:22). Therefore, each officer must have the

approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership in particular. The Lord's appointment of an individual to either of these offices is recognized primarily through the church's formal discernment of the graces and gifts requisite for the respective office and the individual's own willingness to serve Christ and His church in that undertaken capacity. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never be without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered.

Paragraph 2. The Process of Recognition

1) Pastoral Nomination—Nominations to the office of elder or deacon shall be made by the elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The elders alone may at any time during the year nominate a candidate or candidates to either or both offices and call a special congregational business meeting for their consideration. Likewise, members are free at any time to suggest to the elders the names of men whom they consider to be potential officers.

2) Congregational Approval—Any church meeting for the election of officers will be announced at least two (2) weeks previous to its being held. The names of all nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. During the discussion the nominee under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the church until the written ballot is taken. The scriptural qualifications shall be read with explanation given as needed, and the nominee's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the nominee. The church should seek unity of mind concerning each nominee, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election. This vote shall take place by written ballot subsequent to a full and free discussion oriented to the relevant Scriptural passages. The vote shall stand as it is first given in the written ballot.

Paragraph 3. Installation

Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer shall be installed by the laying on of the hands of the eldership. This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the whole church (Acts 13:1-3). The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer elected. It is the duty of each member to submit to the will of the congregation by sincerely praying for and yielding to the officer thus approved and installed (Eph. 5:21; I Thess. 5:12-13).

Paragraph 4. Confirmation

Church officers 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 confirmation of church officers will occur in the same manner as the confirmation of church members. Individual members sustain a life-time membership in the church provided that they persevere in the graces and practices of true Christian character, that they abide in the responsibilities of membership as specified in this Constitution, and that they continue to desire membership. Even so, those called to the offices of Deacon and Elder are called for life provided that they continue to be faithful members of the church, persevere in manifesting the graces and gifts requisite to their office, and are willing to serve. If any church officer at any time manifests conduct inconsistent with Christian character, ceases to demonstrate the graces or gifts of his office, or becomes unwilling or unable to discharge the duties of his office he will be subject to formal censure or removal from office according to the recommendation of the eldership and the agreement of the congregation.

Should an individual member come to have objective concerns over the fitness of a particular church officer to continue in office he should first address that officer privately. If his concerns continue after he has dealt privately with the officer in question he should bring his concerns to the entire eldership. At this point, he must trust Christ to direct the elders in the righteous resolution of the matter. Members must at all points be careful to obey the directives of I Tim. 5:17-20 and must recognize that the elders are themselves bound by these directives in dealing with one another. (See Section 6.)

SECTION 6. THE DISCIPLINE OF CHURCH OFFICERS

Paragraph 1. The Warrant for 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 elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church.

Church officers are subject to the same rules of discipline as the other members. In addition they are subject to public reprimand by the elders (Gal. 2:14; I Tim. 5:20) and/or removal from office (I Tim. 3:1) under two conditions. This may occur if they are no longer qualified for their office or capable of fulfilling its functions and refuse to resign their office voluntarily. This may occur also if their behavior is disorderly or scandalous, thereby bringing reproach to Christ and the church and setting a bad example before the brethren.

Paragraph 2. The Procedure for 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 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. 18:15).

Since this is such a delicate and serious matter, the elders shall proceed with due caution and earnest prayer (I Tim. 5:19). If the elders judge discipline to be necessary, they shall inform the congregation of the basis for the proposed discipline. The removal of an officer shall require congregational approval at a duly called congregational meeting. Two-thirds majority of members present and voting will effect such removal.

SECTION 7. TERMINATION OF OFFICE

Paragraph 1. Reasons for Termination

1) By Voluntary Resignation—An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion and for good and valid reasons. This resignation together with its reasons and the date upon which he wishes his resignation to be effective shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the Church.

2) By Failure to Receive Confirmation—Should need arise for a formally expressed confirmation of confidence in an officer, this should be conducted in a manner similar to the recognition of officers in Section 5, Paragraph 2 of this article. An officer is removed from office when he fails to be confirmed by at least three fourths of the members present and voting. The eldership may at their discretion call for a vote of confidence on any officer at any time.

3) By Removal Through Non-culpable Incompetence—In cases where the elders determine that an officer is no longer competent to fulfill all the duties of the office by reason of infirmities (I Sam. 8:4-5) not in and of themselves culpable (II Sam. 21:15-17), they shall in the absence of his resignation recommend to the congregation that he be removed from office. 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.

4) By Removal Through Disciplinary Action of the Church—An officer may be removed from office by congregational vote pursuant to Section 6.

Paragraph 2. Implications of Termination

1) When a man leaves office he no longer retains the authority of that office and may no longer continue in its functions, privileges, and titles with respect to this church, other churches, and society at large.

2) It is expected that all former officers will respect the sanctity of the trust previously given to them and that they will maintain the confidentiality of all ecclesiastical matters (Prov. 11:13).

3) A man having previously held office and relinquished it may be reconsidered for office only in the manner prescribed in Section 5.

SECTION 8. BOARD OF TRUSTEES OR DIRECTORS

Any Board required by the laws of the state to act as the legal representatives of the church shall consist of the officers of the church (elders and deacons). Should the number of members required for any such Board be beyond the number of church officers, the officers shall nominate, and the congregation shall approve by its suffrage, enough male members of the church to make up the minimum number of persons required to comply with the laws of the state or as is thought needful by the church officers.

Any such Board would represent the church in legal matters, including holding in trust the church's property, but the Board shall not act on matters of consequence without a specific vote of the church authorizing such action.

Article 5

Ordinances of Worship

SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT

The promotion and protection of the public worship of God comprises a primary purpose of the local church (John 4:23-24; Matt. 28:18-20; Acts 2:47; I Cor. 14:23-25). Pursuant of this end, this church will adhere to the stipulations of the London Confession, Chapter 22, concerning "Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day," especially pertaining to the regulation of corporate worship solely by the directives of Scripture.

Included in the regulative principle of Scripture, two ordinances of special significance are commanded of us, namely, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Neither of them has saving merit, nor is receiving them absolutely

necessary for salvation, nor is any saving grace imparted to the recipient through the water of baptism or the bread and cup of the Supper. Nevertheless they are means of grace and powerful aids to the faith of the believers who properly participate in them. Accordingly our Lord is concerned that they be observed unto edification, in a decent and orderly manner. Therefore, our polity regarding their observance is specified in the following section.

SECTION 2. THE POLITY OF BAPTISM

Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for baptism, and all such persons should be baptized (Acts 2:38). Believing that baptism is the God-ordained means of declaring personal union with Christ through faith and the cleansing of sin (Rom. 6:3-5; Acts 22:16; I Pet. 3:21), we shall receive into the regular membership of the church only those who have been baptized as believers on Christ “into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

SECTION 3. THE POLITY OF THE LORD’S SUPPER

Whereas baptism is the one time declarative ordinance for confessing faith in Christ, the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church until He comes (I Cor. 11:26). Therefore, in virtue of the unity of all the true churches of Christ, which collectively are His body (I Cor. 10:16; 12:27-28; Col. 1:18), and in virtue of our Lord’s will that only those who are under the government of His church should be admitted to the privileges of His church (Acts 2:41-42; I Cor. 10:16; and see London Confession, 26:12), we welcome all those believers who are members in good standing in evangelical, true churches to partake of the Lord’s Supper. Exceptions may be granted by the elders at their discretion after careful deliberation with the parties involved. This is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemn joy (Ps. 2:11-12) and dignity, even though the bread and the cup of the Supper are and remain only symbols of the body and the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Article 6

Congregational 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 other business. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

SECTION 2. NOTICE OF MEETINGS

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 of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting.

SECTION 3. QUORUM

The regular members present at any properly convened congregational meeting shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

SECTION 4. CHAIRMANSHIP

As a general rule, the chairman presiding over any business meeting shall be a member of the board of elders. Upon occasion, the elders may appoint a member of the board of deacons to preside in their stead.

SECTION 5. VOTING

All regular members in good standing in the church may normally vote on any question properly brought before the congregation. At the discretion of the eldership voting and/or attendance at congregational meetings may at times be restricted to those who are twenty years of age and older. In submission to the Scriptural injunctions of I Cor. 14:34-35 and I Tim. 2:11-14, only male members will be permitted to make public statements or address questions during business meetings. Female members are requested to address questions to their husbands and/or the elders in private.

Unanimity of heart and mind and voice under God shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realized, not less than a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting shall be required to constitute approval of any resolution. In some cases, as specified in the Constitution, a three-quarters majority shall be required.

Article 7

Inter-Church Relations

SECTION 1. AUTONOMY

We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church (Eph. 5:23) and who directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture (Acts 14:21-23; I Tim. 3:1f; Titus 1:5f). The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand under the authority of Holy Scripture (Acts 16:4; I Cor. 7:17).

SECTION 2. COOPERATION

The church should cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern (II Cor. 8:18-24). We may seek the assistance (I Cor. 16:1-2; Phil. 4:15) and should seek the counsel (I Thess. 1:7; 2:14) of other churches in matters of special importance and concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall ever be binding on this church (Acts 14:21-23, with Heb. 13:17, and see London Confession 26:15).

SECTION 3. MUTUAL CARE

In order to provide greater protection for the spiritual safety of this church both corporately and individually, this church shall sustain an explicit arrangement of mutual care with the elderships of sister congregations. These elderships will be identified at each annual meeting. Should any member after protracted dealings with the eldership of this church conclude that he or she had been treated contrary to Scripture or contrary to the stipulations of this Constitution, application for counsel and intervention should be made to one of these elderships. Should the eldership of this church ever be reduced to one or none, application should be made to one of these churches for oversight according to the provision of Article 4, Section 3, Paragraph 2.

Article 8

Constitutional Authority

SECTION 1. NATURE

This Constitution, as with any other non-inspired document, is not infallible. It does, however, reflect an earnest and sincere attempt to apply the Scriptures in ordering the life of this local church. Furthermore, we as members of this church, including the elders, have solemnly committed ourselves to follow this Constitution in ordering the life of this church (see the Covenant). Therefore the demands of the ninth commandment, and the sanctity of truth in general, require that the elders and all of the members of this church abide by our mutual commitment.

SECTION 2. DEFICIENCIES

Only when we must obey God rather than the provisions of this Constitution may its requirements be disregarded (Acts 5:29). If at any time a member of this church becomes aware that adherence to this Constitution would violate biblical principle, he should make this known to the elders. If the elders conclude that biblical principle requires disregarding a provision of this Constitution, they are obligated to communicate this together with the reason(s) for their conclusion to the church at a duly called meeting of the church. Furthermore, relevant amendments to this Constitution must be submitted to the church and acted upon in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 within one year following such an informational meeting.

SECTION 3. AMENDMENTS

See Article 1, Section 2, Paragraph 4, Statement 3.