

**The Constitution of
The Heritage Baptist Church of Owensboro, Kentucky**

Preamble

We, the members of the Heritage Baptist Church of Owensboro, Kentucky, do ordain and establish the following Articles, to which we voluntarily and solemnly submit ourselves.

Article 1: Name

The official name of this church is the Heritage Baptist Church of Owensboro, Inc.

Article 2: Purpose

This church exists by the grace of God and for the glory of God, which shall be the ultimate purpose of all its activities. We seek to glorify the God of Scripture (Eph. 3:21) by promoting His worship (Exod. 20:3-11; John 4:23-24; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:5), edifying and equipping the saints (1 Cor. 12:27-28; 14:12; 18-19, 26; Eph. 4:11-16), evangelizing the nations (Acts 13 and 14; 1 Cor. 14:24-25; 1 Tim. 2:1-4; 3:15), planting and strengthening churches, calling other assemblies to biblical faithfulness and purity (Acts 11:29-30; 15:3, 36, 41; 16:5) and ministering to the needy (Rom. 15:26-27; Gal. 2:10; 6:10), thus proclaiming and defending God's perfect law and glorious gospel of grace throughout the world (Luke 24:47; Acts 20:20-21, 27; Rom. 1:15-8:39; Jude 3).

Article 3: Covenant

Section 1: Our New Covenant Confidence

God has graciously entered into a New Covenant with His people (Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40; Heb. 8:7-13; 10:16-17; 13:20-21) through the work of Jesus Christ (Heb. 8:6), whose obedience and blood infallibly secure all of its benefits for them (Matt. 26:26-28; Heb. 13:20-21). By making us members of the one body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 4:25), the New Covenant lays upon us responsibilities, not only to God, but also to each other. In this covenant God writes His law upon our hearts and causes us to walk in His ways. Thus, both our desire and ability to obey spring from the work of Jesus Christ. Christ purchased for us the Holy Spirit, by whose gift of faith we obey, not to establish our own righteousness before God but to express our gratitude for grace. Heritage Baptist Church exists on the basis of the New Covenant and as a local expression of the power and grace of God in that covenant. In our church covenant we expressly renew the New Covenant, confessing both our joyful faith in the God of that covenant and our willing embrace of its obligations. These New Covenant obligations require that we love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves. By the grace of that covenant, we commit ourselves to the following obligations:

Section 2: Our New Covenant Commitments

- I. 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 declare His glory to the nations and have no other gods before Him.
- II. We agree to worship God in His appointed way, only through the mediation of His Son, excluding from our worship anything that He has not appointed, observing the ordinances of the New Covenant, not forsaking but carefully and conscientiously attending all the meetings of the church except where legitimately hindered, practicing regular private devotions as well as family worship and uniting with another faithful church when we move from this place.
- III. We agree not to use the name of our God lightly or to take it upon ourselves carelessly, but to adorn the triune name of God we have taken upon ourselves in baptism and to labor with zeal for the fame of His name and gospel.
- IV. We agree to cease from our own works on the Lord's Day, unless they are works of necessity, and to sanctify the day by consistently attending the meetings of the church, fellowshiping with one another in our homes, performing acts of mercy, as well as engaging in personal devotion and domestic religion.
- V. We agree to honor and obey, within the bounds of Scripture, all our superiors, whether in family, church, state, or business; and, if we be superiors, to deal reasonably and lovingly with our subordinates and thus to teach them by word and example to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. We promise to resist the spirit of our age, especially with regard to the ordinance of marriage—as wives, respectfully submitting to our husbands and, as husbands, tenderly loving our wives.
- VI. 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 walking together in brotherly love, caring for one another, bearing one another's burdens, watching over each other, faithfully admonishing one another, promptly repenting when we have sinned against one another and not abusing our Christian liberties to our own harm or that of our brethren.
- VII. We agree to possess our bodies in holiness as vessels joined to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, to avoid all uncleanness of thought, speech, or action and to bear witness against the uncleanness and sensuality of our age.
- VIII. We agree to be diligent in our callings, in order that we may provide for our own households, avoid theft of time, money, or goods, give tithes and offerings to the church, provide for the needy and support the advancement of the kingdom of God.
- IX. We agree earnestly to promote truth among men, to avoid anything that would prejudice the truth or injure our neighbor's good name, to promote the unity of the Spirit by our words and prayers and to avoid all gossip as undermining such unity.
- X. We agree to be fully content with our own condition in life, to delight in the advancement of our neighbor, to avoid envying him or coveting anything that is his and to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

Article 4: Confessions

We accept the *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* (excepting the assertions regarding the salvation of the mentally incompetent [10:3] and the identity of the antichrist [26:4]), as our primary confession of faith. We also accept the *Canons of Dortrecht* (excluding Article 17 of the first head of doctrine which includes the children of believing parents in the covenant), the

Abstract of Principles (excepting the assertion of Article 15 that participation in the Lord's Supper without exception requires believer's baptism) and the *Baptist Faith and Message of 2000* as excellent expressions of the teaching of the Word of God. We find them to be an aid in controversy, a confirmation in faith, a means of edification in righteousness and a basis for church unity. We acknowledge, however, the inerrant Scriptures to be the supreme authority in all matters of faith, morals and order.

Article 5: Membership

Section 1: Warrant

The New Testament requires of all Christians formal, open, solemn, voluntary and enduring commitment to Jesus Christ, His truth and His people. A genuine Christian's commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ is inseparable from his commitment to His truth and His people. Such a commitment to Christ, His truth and His people ordinarily requires a formal, open, solemn, voluntary and enduring commitment to membership in a local church. This is true for the following biblical reasons: (1) Fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission requires church membership. According to the Great Commission of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20), there is an inseparable connection between making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them. The Apostles implemented this commission by gathering baptized disciples into local churches. It was therefore in local churches that baptized disciples were taught to observe all that Christ commanded (Acts 2:38-42; 1 Cor. 4:1-7; Tit. 1:7). With the uncertain exception of the Ethiopian eunuch, the New Testament knows nothing of believing men and women who are not members of local churches. (2) Obedience to Christ's directive to observe the Lord's Table requires church membership. Since all believing men and women are required by Christ to observe the Lord's Table (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-25), and since the Lord's Table is clearly a local church ordinance (1 Cor. 11:17, 18, 33, 34 cp. 1 Cor. 1:1, 2), it follows that all Christians must belong to a local New Testament church in order to partake biblically. (3) The New Testament presents the local church as a distinct and defined group of individuals. This defined group may be counted (Acts 2:41-42; 4:4) and added to (Acts 2:47; 5:14). It may also be called upon to select leaders and representatives from among itself (Acts 6:1-6; 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19, 23) so that it becomes an organization with recognized officers (Phil. 1:1; Acts 14:23); may be officially gathered together (Acts 14:27; 15:22); may observe the Lord's Table as a formal, corporate assembly (1 Cor. 11:17-20, 33-34) and may carry out church discipline by vote (Matt. 18:17; 2 Cor. 2:6) with the result that some who were within the boundaries of the church are put out (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:12, 13).

Section 2: Prerequisites

I. To be eligible for membership, a person must demonstrate repentance toward God and its fruits (Acts 26:20), as well as that faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) which works through love (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:18, 22). He must also be baptized as a believer (Acts 2:38-42).

II. The person applying for membership must profess substantial agreement with and submission to the constitution and confessions (as stated in Article IV) of this church. Anyone who is in substantial disagreement with the constitution or confessions of the church could not be consistently or cheerfully submissive to the church's teaching ministry. To admit such a person to membership in this church would be unwise (Eph. 4:3) and unscriptural. Mastery of the

church's confessions is not required of any new disciple before he is admitted to church membership. (Such a requirement would violate the order of Matt. 28:19, 20, which instructs us to disciple, baptize and *then* teach the baptized disciple to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded.) It is necessary, however, that any disciple applying for membership be teachable, submissive and in basic agreement with what he understands of the church's confessions.

III. Potential church members must be willing to submit to the eldership of the church (Heb. 13:17). One who cannot intelligently and freely submit to a church's government should not belong to that church.

IV. To be eligible for church membership, a person must not be deservedly under the corrective discipline of another church (Matt. 18:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14-15; 3 John 9-10; 2 Cor. 2:6-8).

V. If a church member concludes that he never met or no longer truly satisfies the prerequisites for membership, he is under moral obligation to inform the elders of that fact.

Section 3: Reception

I. The scriptural pattern for the reception of new members involves careful inquiry into the potential member's fitness according to the prerequisites detailed in Roman numeral two of this section. Members are received only upon the recommendation of the elders and by the consent of the church.

II. A person who desires to become a member of the church shall apply to the elders and request an interview. During the interview the elders will seek to determine whether that person meets the prerequisites for membership. In the case of those eighteen years of age and over, the elders will normally require the completion of the new members' class. This class thoroughly exposes the potential member to the doctrines of the church (as summarized in our statements of faith) as well as the privileges and responsibilities of membership. At the completion of the class, the elders will interview each prospective member with a view to being certain that the applicant is committed to the responsibilities of church membership and substantially in agreement with and cheerfully submissive to the doctrines and practices of the church. Those whom the elders believe are qualified will be recommended to the church for membership. Those who are deemed unqualified will not be recommended for membership, but encouraged to seek from the Lord that which is necessary to become qualified.

III. If the potential member has been a member of another church, the elders will seek to determine his reasons for leaving that church and, if possible, request a letter of commendation from that church. When the elders are assured that such an applicant satisfies the requirements for membership, they will recommend his reception to the church.

IV. In order to insure an authentic exercise of congregational consent in the reception of new members, the elders shall announce those they are recommending for membership on two Lord's Days prior to the Lord's Day on which those applicants are to be received. During this period, a written testimony of the applicant's understanding of the gospel and experience of conversion shall also be made available to the members of the church. If the members of the church express no objections to the elders during this period, the applicant may be received by a vote of the church. If objections are raised, the elders will seek to resolve the objections to the satisfaction of the member or members of the church who raised the objections. If no resolution is reached, a meeting of the members of the church shall be called by the elders. After an opportunity for

discussion, a vote will be taken. The applicant must be accepted by two-thirds of those members present and voting.

Section 4: Special Cases

I. Minor Members

Believing that all those who credibly profess faith in Christ ought to be baptized and joined to the church, Heritage Baptist Church will receive into membership young people who have not yet reached the age of eighteen. The light of nature and Christian prudence teach that it is inappropriate to allow such members to vote in meetings of the church. Accordingly, after their eighteenth birthday, those originally received as minor members must complete the new members' class and be received as voting members of the church. Their application for voting membership must be announced for two Lord's Days prior to the Lord's Day on which the church votes to accept them as voting members. If those originally received as minor members do not take this step upon reaching their eighteenth birthday, then, after a reasonable period of time, the elders will speak with them about the matter. If after pastoral encouragement they do not apply for voting church membership, the elders will recommend their removal from the membership of the church as prescribed in Section 5 of this Article.

II. Other Special Circumstances

The eldership of the church may at its discretion recommend for church membership those whose membership may involve special circumstances, providing those recommended satisfy the prerequisites for membership. Such cases may include those whose residence in the area may be temporary and who do not wish to withdraw their membership from their home church or those who because of their health or place of residence cannot comply with the normal requirements of membership. Similarly, the elders may at their discretion allow those to continue as members of Heritage Baptist Church whose membership becomes characterized by such special circumstances.

Section 5: Termination

Introduction:

Just as membership in a local church is mandated by the Word of God, so also its termination must be governed by the principles of the Word of God. Accordingly, membership in Heritage Baptist Church may be terminated in three ways: (1) by death, (2) by transfer or (3) by exclusion.

I. By Death

When a member of the church is removed from our midst by physical death, the elders shall remove his name from the membership roll.

II. By Transfer

The New Testament norm for Christians is that they be members of true local churches. The spiritual health of believers is endangered when they are not thus committed to a church. Therefore, any Christian who leaves the membership of Heritage Baptist Church should seek to do so by means of transfer to another true church. If a member in good standing desires to move his membership to another church, he should submit such a request to the elders. If such a member has not yet chosen a suitable church to which he may transfer, the elders may provide for a transitional period which will allow the departing member to seek guidance from the Lord on the matter. When requested, the elders may transfer a person's membership by sending a letter of commendation to the appropriate officer(s) of the church to which the member wishes his membership to be transferred. 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.

III. By Exclusion

Introduction:

Membership is initiated jointly by the voluntary commitment of the applicant and acceptance by the church. Accordingly, it follows that members may not terminate their membership unilaterally. If a member wishes to terminate his membership and does not seek transfer to another local church, he must be excluded from the membership by a vote of the church. In some cases may a member's conduct may require that he be excluded from the church even though he expresses no wish to be excluded. Exclusion from the church may take two different forms: exclusion not under discipline and exclusion by excommunication.

A. Exclusion not under Discipline

The membership of a person may need to be terminated for reasons which, in the judgment of the elders, do not warrant church discipline. Such cases may include the resignation of a member who concludes that he is not a Christian; the resignation of a member who, for reasons that do not impugn his Christian profession, is no longer willing to fulfill the duties of membership in Heritage Baptist Church; and the relocation of a member who does not remain in contact with the elders of the church. After attempts by the elders to resolve such cases (in a way not requiring exclusion), the elders shall recommend at a business meeting of the church that the member in question be excluded without discipline.

B. Exclusion by Excommunication

According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a church must exclude from its membership any person who persists in teaching or holding serious doctrinal errors, who persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church (Matt. 18:15ff; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; Rom 16:17; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such exclusion by excommunication is stated in Article 7 of this constitution.

Section 6: Privileges

In God's order, commitment normally constitutes the path to privileges. Membership in this church includes the following privileges: (1) Participation in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42; 1 Cor. 11:18-26, 33); (2) In the case of voting members, attendance at, appropriate participation in and voting during church business meetings (Acts 6:1-6 [cp. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:13-14]; 1 Cor. 5:4-7; 13); (3) Laboring to extend God's Kingdom in ministries of the church (as one's gifts, graces and calling make appropriate) (1 Cor. 12:4-27; Eph. 4:7, 11, 12, 16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11); (4) Coming under the formal oversight and care of the pastors of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2-3); and (5) Receiving the loving discipline (if needed) of the membership of the church (Acts 6:1-2; 1 Cor. 5:4-5 (cp. 1 Cor. 1:2); Gal. 6:10). Some or all of these privileges may be revoked if a member comes under the discipline of the church.

Section 7: Records

The elders shall keep careful records of the membership of the church including both past and present members.

Article 6: Officers

Section 1: General Statement

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Col.1:18). He has ordained that individual churches be governed by Himself through officers whom He appoints, who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. These officers govern with due respect to the rights and liberties of the whole church set forth in the Scriptures and elsewhere in this constitution (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; Acts 6:1-7; 2 Cor. 2:6). Christ has ordained that local churches be ruled by elders and served by deacons. Beside the offices of elder and deacon the Scriptures acknowledge no other offices which continue in the church today (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

Section 2: General Prerequisites

- I. All officers of this church must be members. This provision is not to be construed as contradicting Section 8 of this Article.
- II. Any individual set apart to one of these offices must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's confessions of faith and constitution. If he should at any time move from this agreement, he is under immediate, spiritual and moral obligation to make that fact known to the elders privately.
- III. While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given to women and the wonderful assistance they may render to the officers of the church (Rom. 16:1-6; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11), the Bible prohibits them from holding either the office of deacon or elder (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 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 (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15). With regard to

formal ministries of the church where the whole congregation is not gathered (for example, Sunday School classes), no woman shall be appointed to a teaching or leading position over men. Nevertheless, we gratefully acknowledge the valuable gifts and assistance of women in the formal instruction of children and other women (Titus 2:3-5), in the informal instruction even of men (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 19:26) and in the diaconal and benevolent ministries of the church (1 Tim. 3:11; 5:9-10).

Section 3: Elders

I. Those who have been called and equipped by God to rule and teach in the church are identified as elders, pastors, or overseers. These three names designate one and the same office in a New Testament church (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11-12; Titus 1:5, 7).

II. Anyone desiring the office of an elder must evidence to God's people the personal, domestic and ministerial qualifications set forth in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

III. Because the authority of the elders of the church is human authority exercised in the house of God, it has both high prerogatives and important limitations:

A. It is divinely-delegated authority. Thus, elders are answerable to God for the exercise of this authority (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). They are, therefore, obligated to discharge all the duties specified in the Scriptures in such passages as Acts 20:17-35, 1 Peter 5:1-4 and Hebrews 13:17.

B. When elders exercise this authority by requiring obedience to their leadership, they must seek to gain the consciences of God's people through the ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17).

C. The authority of the elders does not include the right to make all decisions unilaterally. The Bible and our confessions make clear that decisions having to do with corrective discipline and the recognition of officers require the consent of the local church (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6). It is according to the mind of Christ that other matters such as the reception and exclusion of church members, the full support and involuntary removal of officers and major financial decisions be approved by the consent of the church. Nevertheless, the elders must provide definitive leadership to the church in the making of such decisions.

D. The authority of the elders is limited to the sphere of the local church. They may not require consequences for sin beyond those of church discipline, invade the spheres of other ordained human authorities (husbands, fathers, civil rulers and employers), or command God's people regarding matters not specified in Scripture (Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14). They must, however, order the house of God by the application of His Word (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3a; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Cor. 7:25-28; 35-40).

E. The authority of elders is conditioned by the fact that they are themselves members of the local church. While elders are shepherds over the flock, they are also members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is entitled to the same privileges, is obligated by the same responsibilities and is subject to the same discipline as are all other members of the church. Thus, each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and accountable to the church as a whole (Matt. 18:17; 23:9; 26:31; 2 Cor. 11:19-20; Gal. 2:11; 3 John 1, 9-10). (Section 8 of this Article provides for the temporary oversight of elders from a sister church who would not be members of this particular local church.)

F. The authority of every elder (overseer or pastor) is the same. Thus, every elder has equal rule in the church. Though gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from

elder to elder, this diversity must never undermine real parity among the elders (Acts 20:28 [cp. 17]; Gal 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17).

G. Finally, the authority of the elders is a very real authority. When it is biblically exercised, God's people are required to submit to this authority (Heb. 13:17; note the scriptural titles and functions of the office).

IV. One crucial aspect of the duties of elders is overseeing the flock of God. Fulfillment of this duty shall include regular pastoral visits with each member of the church.

V. Another crucial aspect of the duties of elders is exercising leadership with regard to the meetings and worship of the church. The elders shall appoint such meetings as they believe good for the spiritual health of the church and assure that they are conducted to the glory of God and according to the provisions of His Word.

VI. While the New Testament clearly indicates that there may be elders who are not financially supported by the church, the elders who rule well, and especially those who labor in the word and doctrine, will be maintained in material necessities and disentangled from the cares of another vocation according to their gifts, the needs and capability of the church and the direction of Christ her Head (1 Tim.5:17ff).

VII. 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. If, however, an elder fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications, he may be removed from his office according to the provisions of Section 6 of this Article.

Section 4: Deacons

I. Deacons are primarily responsible for assisting the elders in those practical aspects of ministry which would otherwise distract them from their priorities of the ministry of the Word, prayer and shepherding. Such practical matters include the administration of benevolence, the maintenance and improvement of the church's facilities, the management of various business affairs and the facilitation of ministries within the church.

II. Deacons must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders. The elders may at their discretion appoint one of the deacons to act as the chairman of the deacons in order to facilitate communication with the elders and the general organization of the diaconate.

III. The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall set apart according to its need men who evidence the scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

IV. No term of office shall be fixed for deacons. If a deacon fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications for his office, he may be removed from office according to the provisions of Section 6 of this Article.

Section 5: Appointment of Officers

I. General Statement

The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, He has ordained that they be formally recognized by the consent of the particular church they serve. Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the

eldership (1 Tim. 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (1 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 by means of that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for the particular office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never proceed without much prayerful waiting upon God, careful consideration of the relevant passages of Scripture and thorough evaluation of those persons being considered. Each member of the church has a responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

II. Procedure of Appointment

The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church is carried out in three steps: nomination, election and ordination.

A. Nomination

The members of the church are encouraged to express to the elders (privately) their views concerning those whom Christ may be gifting for office in the church. The elders will seriously consider the wisdom God gives to His church, however, nominations to office are to be made by the eldership.

B. Election

Any church meeting for the election of officers shall be announced on four Lord's Days prior 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 meeting until a written ballot is taken. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, 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 unanimity concerning each nominee, but where unanimity is not realized, three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election.

C. Ordination

Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer-elect shall be ordained and installed into office by the laying on of the hands of the eldership. This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the church (Acts 13:1-3). The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer-elect. Should reasons arise which prohibit the elders from conscientiously ordaining an officer-elect (1 Tim. 5:22), the church shall be informed of their reasons in an appropriate and discreet manner.

Section 6: Review of Officers

I. Officers should hold office as long as in the esteem of the church they meet the biblical qualifications for their office.

II. A meeting to review the qualifications of an officer may be called by a majority of the elders, or a majority of the other elders in the case of an elder. Members of the church may also request such a meeting. This request must be made in writing with the signatures of one-fourth of the total voting membership of the church. It must be presented to the elders, who shall in a timely and constitutional way (see Paragraph 3 below) call such a meeting.

III. Any meeting for the review of an officer shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. At the meeting the officer under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave until the issue has been adequately discussed. The scriptural qualifications must form the basis of the discussion and decision of the church. The officer's qualifications must be openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the officer. Prior to the written ballot, the officer under discussion must be permitted to return to the meeting and defend himself. The church should seek unanimity of mind concerning the matter, but if such unanimity is not realized, two-thirds of those ballots cast shall be required for the confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing confirmation will be immediately removed from his office.

IV. An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion. This resignation shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the church and in a timely fashion announced to the church.

Section 7: Full Support of Elders

I. Though all elders are equal as to the authority of their office, not all elders are equal in possessing the qualifications warranting financial support in the office. The Bible teaches that special ability in ruling the church and, more especially, in public teaching and preaching are gifts worthy of full financial support (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). Thus, before the church undertakes the full support of an elder, it must recognize that he (or a nominee to the eldership) possesses special ministerial gifts. He should be presently excelling in the exercise of those gifts for the benefit of the church in ways appropriate to his opportunities. Caution should be exercised before fully supporting an elder because (1) full support necessitates his removal from a secular vocation, which, in the interests of Christ's kingdom and of his family, might be a more advantageous position for him to occupy; (2) a significant portion of the church's financial stewardship is involved, for which Christ will hold it accountable and (3) a fully supported elder has a greater influence upon the church, for good or ill. Any financial support required by a degree of ministry that would hinder an elder's full-time employment in a secular vocation is subject to the provisions of this section.

II. The elders may recommend to the church that an existing elder or a nominee to the eldership be fully supported.

A. In the case of a nominee, full support may be considered in conjunction with the consideration of his qualifications for the eldership. In such a case, the elders will inform the church of their recommendation when a business meeting for this purpose is announced. A separate discussion and vote for both election to the office and full support in the office is not necessary.

B. In the case of an existing elder who is being recommended for full support, a church meeting to consider this recommendation shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held.

III. During any meeting where full support is being considered, special attention shall be given to the relevant teaching of Scripture (Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). During the discussion, the man under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the meeting until a written ballot is taken. Such discussion must reflect the fear of God, the claims of truth and the gravity of the matter. Any vote for full support requires approval by three-fourths of the ballots cast.

IV. The full support of elders is subject to review in distinction from his simple continuance in office. Any meeting for such a review shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. During the discussion the elder under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the meeting until a written ballot is taken. The relevant scriptural qualifications must form the basis of the discussion and decision of the church. The church should seek unanimity concerning the matter, but if such unanimity is not realized, two-thirds of those ballots cast shall be required for the continuation of full support. If two-thirds of those voting do not affirm the continuation of full support, it will be terminated by this vote.

V. An officer may withdraw from full support and the duties it entails without resigning his office. This withdrawal shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the church and in a timely fashion announced to the church.

Section 8: Loss of a Plurality of Elders

I. This constitution assumes, and the norms of biblical church order require, that a plurality of elders oversee the local church. Therefore, if at any period in the life of the church, there no longer exists a plurality of elders, and this lack cannot in a timely way be supplied, the remaining elder (or the church, if there is no elder) 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*. The purpose of such an arrangement is to provide both pastoral care and leadership in the recognition of a plurality of elders.

II. When a suitable eldership willing to undertake these responsibilities is located, the church shall within a reasonable period of time officially place itself under that eldership. If the church has a remaining elder, the aforementioned 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-fourths 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-fourths majority withdrawn) in the same way at the annual meeting of the church in succeeding years. When a plurality of resident elders is realized, the oversight arrangement described here shall immediately cease.

Article 7: Discipline

Section 1: Introduction

I. Every member of the church is accountable to the church and liable to its discipline (1 Cor. 12:12-27; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Mutual submission to one another

(Eph. 5:21) and to the elders whom the Lord has set over His church (1 Pet. 5:5) is intended by the Lord to result in the sanctification of each individual member and of the whole body of the church collectively.

II. Church discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. Whenever feasible, an effort must be made to correct error, resolve difficulty and remove offense through private counsel and admonition before more public steps are taken (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19, 20). The principles given to us in Matt. 18:15-16, Rom. 16:17-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim. 5:19-20 and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and appropriately applied to each case of corrective discipline. In some cases public admonition or public repentance may be warranted (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20). In 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). All the members of the church are obliged to submit to and enforce the decision of the church in its acts of discipline.

III. Since the church is a spiritual and religious institution, the punishments (2 Cor. 2:6) inflicted by the church are spiritual. They may 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), suspension from the Lord's Supper and/or other privileges of church membership (1 Cor. 5:11) as well as excommunication (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13). They are intended to produce 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).

IV. The goals of corrective discipline must always be the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6) and the spiritual restoration of the offender (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 5:20). For these reasons all church members should pray earnestly for God's gracious, restorative blessing upon all who are disciplined.

Section 2: Public Reproof and Repentance

Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort before the gathered church to call an impenitent member to repentance for sin too blatant to be dealt with in an exclusively private manner. Public repentance may be necessary to deal with serious sin even where there has been private repentance. The elders may, therefore, require such a member to publicly confess his repentance before the church. The elders may administer public censure whenever in their judgment 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 public censure, own and confess their sin and manifest a transformed life (Prov. 28:13) shall be publicly commended for their godly repentance (2 Cor. 7:7-11). If within a reasonable period of time public censure is not heeded, further discipline will be imposed.

Section 3: Suspension

I. The Bible teaches that it is ordinarily necessary before proceeding to excommunicate someone from the church to exercise the preliminary step of suspension (Matt. 18:15-17; Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). This step is graciously designed by God to prevent the necessity of

excommunication by an intensified call from the church to repentance. Suspension consists in the withholding of some or all of the privileges of church membership depending on how serious the situation may be. 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.

II. To be valid, an act of suspension must have the approval of two-thirds of the members voting. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, and in the interest of preventing the premature disclosure of a member's sinful conduct, the elders shall have the right, at their discretion, to impose a temporary suspension of no more than three months.

III. Suspension is required for a stubborn, private offender (Matt. 18:15-17); a person guilty of divisive teaching or behavior (Rom. 16:17-20; Titus 3:10); a disorderly person (2 Thess. 3:6-15); a scandalous sinner who has brought open reproach upon the name of Christ, but whose repentance is still in question; and one who shows contempt of church discipline by absenting himself from the meetings of the church, or refusing to meet with the elders so that a matter may be investigated (Matt. 18:17; Num. 16:12, 20, 23-27).

IV. If suspension is blessed by the Lord to bring about true repentance on the part of the offending person, the suspension will be lifted and his privileges happily restored. If, however, after a reasonable period of time the person is not brought to true repentance, the elders will recommend to the church that the one suspended be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Section 4 of this Article.

Section 4: Excommunication

I. In addition to the excommunication of those who have been previously suspended and have not manifested repentance, some expressions of sin (ethical or doctrinal) are so scandalous, gross and heinous in their nature that preliminary actions such as public reproof and suspension are inadequate. In such cases, the guilty member may be immediately excommunicated by the church (1 Cor 5:1-4). This severe measure is to be employed only when both aggravated lawlessness is discovered and there are no hopeful signs of repentance. This measure is designed as a means of grace to purge the lawbreaker of his lethal attachment to sin through a sincere and enduring repentance (1 Cor 5:5; 6:9-11). The elders, therefore, having made earnest but unsuccessful efforts to bring the offender to true repentance, shall report his impenitence to the church and recommend that he be excommunicated.

II. All acts of excommunication must be decided by the gathered church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4; 2 Cor. 2:6). To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of two-thirds of the members voting.

Section 5: Restoration

Since one crucial purpose of church discipline is to restore a fallen brother, it is the duty and privilege of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a suspended or excommunicated member who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance (2 Cor 2:6-8). This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church by two-thirds of the members voting.

Article 8: Ordinances

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. Neither of these ordinances has saving merit, nor is any grace automatically imparted to the recipient. These ordinances are means of grace and precious aids to the faith of believers.

Section 2: Baptism

Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for baptism, and all such persons should be baptized and joined to a local church (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 5:13, 14). Believing that baptism in water is the God-ordained sign of one's personal union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection and the 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 as believers "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Immersion in water is the biblical mode of baptism. A true believer, however, whose baptism involved an irregularity of mode or circumstance may be recommended for membership at the discretion of the elders.

Section 3: The Lord's Supper

While Baptism is the initiatory ordinance by which one enters the visible church and rightfully should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1 Cor. 11:26). This is a holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity. Yet, 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. In order to maintain the purity of this ordinance, the elders will faithfully seek to ensure that only true believers who are members in good standing of true churches are admitted to the Table. True believers whose church membership involves unusual circumstances may be admitted at the discretion of the elders. The elders shall insure that the Lord's Supper is celebrated regularly by the church.

Article 9: Business Meetings

Section 1: The Annual Business Meeting

An annual business meeting of the church shall be held in January or February of each year. A financial report and the proposed budget shall be presented and approved by a vote of the church. A membership report shall also be given by the elders. This report shall list the members of the church, noting their status as minor or voting. It shall also identify those whose membership involves unusual circumstances and indicate those added to and removed from the membership in the past year. The general reason for each removal shall be included in the report.

Section 2: The Occasional Business Meetings

Additional church business meetings may be called by the pastors. They may also be called by one-fourth of the voting members, providing they make a written request for such a meeting. In the latter case, this request must state the reason for the meeting, be signed by one-fourth of the members in good standing and be presented to the pastors, who shall in turn make the proper announcement of the meeting. Except where this constitution requires a longer period of announcement, every meeting at which business is to be transacted shall be announced at regular services for at least two successive Lord's Days. Other meetings at which there is no business requiring a vote may be called at the discretion of the pastors without previous notice.

Section 3: Voting

The voting membership of the church is constituted by those who meet the requirements of Article 5, Section 4, I, excepting those suspended by the elders or a vote of the church. All voting members should regard their presence at a duly called church meeting with the same seriousness and responsible churchmanship with which they would regard their attendance at any other meeting of the church. It shall be our goal to discern prayerfully the mind of God so that it may be said of us, as it was said of the church in Acts 6, that this "pleased the whole multitude." In situations where unanimity is not realized, except where the constitution requires a different proportionate vote, a two-thirds majority of those voting will make a motion valid. The voting members present at any properly convened meeting of the church shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. Abstentions from any vote will not be counted as "no" or included in the tally of "those voting."

Section 4: Clerk

The elders shall appoint a clerk from among the members of the church. The responsibility of the clerk will be to record all the business transacted by the church, collect all documents submitted to the church at its meetings and provide for the church and its elders a careful record of the church's business. This record shall be available to the church and its elders in the church office. The elders shall have the authority to replace the clerk whenever it seems wise.

Article 10: Trustees

In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," this church shall have an official Board of Trustees. The official board shall consist of the elders as voting members and deacons as non-voting members. In the absence of a resident plurality of elders, both the remaining elder and the diaconate must approve any decision relevant to the Board of Trustees. The Board shall appoint from its number the legal representatives of the church required by the civil authorities. These legal representatives shall act only with the consent of the Board of Trustees.

Article 11: Constitutional Authority

Section 1: Nature

This constitution, like all merely human documents, may be fallible. It simply reflects an earnest and sincere attempt to apply the Scriptures in ordering the life of this local church. Furthermore,

we as members of this church have solemnly committed ourselves to follow this constitution in ordering the life of this church. 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 the provisions of this constitution.

Section 2: Deficiencies

If at any time an elder or a member of the church believes that adherence to this constitution would require a violation of the Word of God, he should make this known to the elders. If the elders conclude that biblical principle requires an amendment of the constitution, they must communicate this matter in a timely way, submit relevant amendments to the church and act upon them in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of this Article.

Section 3: Amendments

Amendments to this constitution must be adopted by three-fourths of those voting at any regular church meeting or at a special meeting called for this purpose. Such proposed amendments shall be distributed in written form to the membership at least four (4) weeks prior to such a meeting.

Article 12: Ecclesiastical Affiliations

Both Scripture (2 Cor. 8:18-24) and the *1689 Baptist Confession* (Chapter 26, Paragraph 15) teach the legitimacy and value of fellowship, consultation and cooperation with local churches of like faith and order. Upon the recommendation of the elders, this church may join itself to various associations of churches. Such affiliations must be entered by a vote of the church. Withdrawal from such an affiliation also requires such a vote. A two-thirds majority of those voting is necessary in both cases. The decision of no church or association of churches shall at any time be regarded as legally binding on this church. Delegates to such associations of churches shall be chosen by the eldership of the church. The elders will oversee all delegates and business matters connected with such associations. Any positions taken or votes cast by the delegates must reflect the views of the church as led by its elders.