

North American Mission Board

THE CHURCH CONSTITUTION GUIDE

THE CHURCH PLANTING GROUP



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Soon after the excitement of the launch, the church planter is hit by the realization that for the church to survive for any length of time, it will need organizational and administrative structure. For some planters, dealing with administrative matters is second nature. They enjoy drafting the documents and filling out paperwork. The other 90% of planters handle the process as a necessary evil that will move the church toward maturity.

Leading the young congregation to adopt a strong, biblical, covenant, constitution and bylaws isn't easy. Today, several trends have converged that have had the effect of making the Southern Baptist pew more diverse than ever. Therefore, church planters should cast a vision very early for what kind of structure the church will embrace in the development of the core group. This structure should be in harmony with the Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) and The Ecclesiological Guides for Southern Baptist Church Planters (Ecclesiological Guides), which were adopted by the North American Mission Board (NAMB).

Today's Challenge

It wasn't that long ago when Southern Baptist churches were like McDonalds, pretty much all alike. Lifeway (then called the Sunday School Board) published a curriculum that every church used. If you went on vacation and visited a Southern Baptist church it probably be a *First Baptist Church*. Sunday School started at 9:45 a.m. and worship at 11:00 a.m. If it was a real creative congregation, it would start at 10:45 a.m.

Nearly all churches had the same weekly schedule. Remember the time when the standard weekly schedule was two services on Sunday and one on Wednesday night? Most churches had a monthly business meeting. If they were large, they met quarterly. A few of documents governed every church; The Baptist Faith and Message (1963), The Church Covenant (there was only one), and of course, Robert's Rules of Parliamentary Procedure.

For better or worse, things have definitely changed. For starters, church planters have stopped using *Baptist* in their name. This change has allowed Southern Baptists to minister to groups of people in North America like never before. However, with

that simple name change, Southern Baptist churches have filled with believers from several different backgrounds. While these believers have a strong faith, items that are core beliefs in a Baptist church may not be held in common by everyone. What's worse, a church planter can assemble a of team of people, assume they have similar beliefs, and not discover that there are serious gaps until the time comes to write the congregation's statement of faith.

While central points of the faith, mainly Christology, the Trinity and infallibility of Scripture are held in common, other items such as a congregational democracy under the leadership of Christ are completely foreign. These items are both deeply held and rarely discussed. Thus, causing friction when the time comes for the church to adopt a covenant, constitution and bylaws.

At this point, it is too late to avoid conflict because there is pressure for the church to move forward. The best a church planter can do is look out for the best interest of the congregation, while at the same time maintaining as much unity as possible. All of which could have been avoided if the church planter had cast a clear vision from the beginning.

It is crucial, to begin teaching the core group what the church will look like from the earliest stages of the launch. Cover principles that will guide the church to accomplish the mission for which God has created it. At the same time, maintain healthy relationships with those sponsoring groups that have helped to give the church life. Connect the membership to their history. Help the members discover what God has in mind when it comes to church administration. Allow them to own the process. A church planter that does this right may, or may not, have a traditional looking church; however, he won't have a church in which the governance was forced by a series of misunderstanding either.

Step 1

Incorporation

It is a good idea to incorporate as soon as you can. It can even be done before launching. Be sure to have an attorney involved in the process. Usually, one can be found who will do the filing pro-bono. You will need to have three officers- a president, secretary and treasure. The best practice is not to list yourself as an officer. Rather, enlist key lay people as part of the administration of the plant.

In most states, it is a good idea to incorporate early, because this turns the church plant into a legal entity, registered with the state. An incorporated church plant shields members from personal liability. The young congregation is also better able to conduct business. It can open banking accounts, obtain insurance and enter into and out of legal contracts. This process also allows the church to register with the IRS, obtaining their own Employer Identification Number (EIN).

Some church plants have their finances administered by their sponsoring church. Member contributions and employee salary records are maintained at the “mother church.” However, most church planters need to recruit competent, honest people to work with the money, even if this assistance is offered. It is healthy for a young congregation to develop a ministry budget, policies for handling funds and to follow IRS guidelines for non-profit groups. Appendix D contains a sample budget, complete with account codes for use as a guide.

Be sure that along with the budget, proper measures are in place to collect, count, deposit, and disperse money safely. Usually, churches require that at least two people count the money and a third person make the deposit. Be sure that as the planting pastor, the money does not enter into your personal funds. Establishing credibility early on will help to ensure financial health.

Step 2

Adopting a Church Covenant

Once the basic administrative issues are in order, the church planter needs to lead the plant in developing member expectations. The covenant makes clear that the church is a super-natural work of God’s Holy Spirit. God alone has called those He redeemed to come together to be His bride. Because we are His, we should live as His, and accomplish His will together. Stan Norman, in writing about the church covenant in the Ecclesiological Guides for Southern Baptist Churches, explains:

“The idea of covenant underscores that individual believers through the act of regeneration are moved by the Spirit to unite together as a corporate whole called the church. The Baptist concept of a covenant community asserts that the church is the result of the free activity of God in the lives of individual believers. Our “association by covenant in the faith and fellowship” stands in sharp contrast to the

notion that the church is an organization created by coercive governmental authority or institutional/territorial, ecclesiastical manipulation.”(1)

Below is a sample church covenant. It is a basic covenant, which covers the most important areas of a church covenant.

As a member of _____ Church , having made profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and been scripturally baptized, I do covenant before God as I am enabled by His Holy Spirit to:

-Live my life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every area.

-Accept the Word of God as my authority for faith and every day living.

-Follow and be equipped for service by the Church leadership as they are led by the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Word of God.

-Maintain the unity of the Body by acting in love toward other members, and finding my place of service within this part of the Body of Christ. (2)

What beautiful words. There is just one problem. Some congregations adopt powerful sounding covenants, frame them in beautiful artwork, hang them on the wall, and then forget them. However, innovative church plants are finding that by re-focusing on the covenant agreement, they are re-energizing church membership. It isn't that writing creative covenants helps a church realize all it can in Kingdom potential; it is in holding members accountable to the items listed inside the covenant.

While adopting, or developing, a church covenant, a church planter may also want to crystallize guiding statements. A mission statement, for example, is expected to bring clarity to what ministries the church will be involved in, and which ones they will pass over. A well-written mission statement helps energize members for the totality of ministry. It is a great way to remind a young church of global commitments and the need to be a missional congregation.

Purpose statements help to guide the priorities of the congregation. The leaders and members alike know where the budget, time and ministry priorities of the congregation are focused. They keep a local congregation from making the mistake

of having every item as a central priority.

Covenants, mission statements and purpose statements are critical in developing both the philosophy of ministry, and the identity of a young church. They clarify for members and prospects what they can expect. In an age when many choose a church the way they choose a super-store, these words help to change the focus and show the laity that church is about what they give, not what they get. If a church planter does not develop this in the hearts and minds of the core group, it will be hard to establish it in the DNA of the congregation.

These also help churches establish priority. Using a well-developed philosophy of ministry, the church can decide whether or not a ministry opportunity is within the bounds. This guides in establishing budget priorities, staffing obligations and involvement of laity.

Step 3

Establishing a Constitution

After the church has incorporated, adopted a church covenant and implemented key statements that define philosophy of ministry, the next logical step is for the church to develop its own constitution and bylaws. Usually, when a church adopts a constitution, it is because the church has moved from a "mission," or "planting," status to a position of independence. No longer is the church receiving direction or support from denominational or congregational bodies; it is autonomous. However, this does not mean that it will not continue to participate with a local association, state convention or national denomination in order to accomplish shared missiological goals.

When Should We Constitute?

A key question in moving towards adopting a constitution is one of timing. More than one church planter has been struck by the perplexity of the question. If the church moves too early, then the church may not have enough momentum to achieve health. It will not reach critical mass for healthy ministry. On the other hand, should the

congregation wait too long then the church plant will plateau and begin moving backwards. Striking at just the right time will keep the congregation moving towards maturity.

Traditionally, there have been six guidelines planters have considered when deciding the time to constitute. These are outlined by Jack Redford in *Planting New Churches*. He says that a church should constitute when:

- The new congregation had come to a sense of fellowship with Jesus Christ and each other.
- The people have come to perceive the Biblical basis for coming together.
- The people have become aware of the needs of the community, the challenge in their field, and the potential in the field in which their church has been planted.
- The membership has become numerically and financially adequate to perform the ministry needed in the community.
- The congregation has had adequate training in church polity, Christian doctrine, stewardship, and the methods needed by various officers to perform their tasks
- The congregation has become self-supporting and is able to phase out all outside help.(3)

While these six factors are critical, churches in a post-modern world have more complex issues to face. To lead the church towards constituting as a result of a comprehensive, long range plan is the best practice of a church planter. In other words, a church should not move to constitute just because several items can be checked off a chart. Instead, a church should embrace the opportunity to be autonomous when that movement will help the church better accomplish the mission God had in mind when He established the congregation.

Consider, for example, that most lending institutions will not lend money to a congregation that has been constituted for less than one year. If a church plant must have a building in order to meet growth objectives, then constituting may have to come earlier in order to satisfy lender requirements. As long as the sponsoring churches and members understand the plan, and believe God is moving, it is perfectly fine for a church to adopt a constitution while still receiving support from outside. In this case, one or more of those six guidelines may be irrelevant.

Conversely, several plants cross all six of those hurdles, but still constitute too soon. The problem is that once a church constitutes, it is almost like parting sea waters to move it back to a mission status. Why rush? One reason there are so many small, unhealthy, Southern Baptist churches is because of a drive to move congregations to independent status too quickly. Like a child who can't wait to leave home, and then realizes that they aren't quite mature enough to make it on their own, the landscape is littered with immature congregations made poor decisions.

Ultimately, only Christ can reveal the perfect time for a church to move forward and adopt a constitution. The church planter's responsibility is to prepare the congregation to properly handle the next few questions so that when the time comes to adopt a constitution, conflict is held to a minimum.

Guidelines for a Statement of Faith

It is the growing disparity in the Baptist pew that should cause church planters today to bring their congregations through the exercise of writing and adopting a statement of faith. If the church simply opts to affirm the latest Baptist Faith and Message, many in the congregation will give the statement a pass without ever studying the document. Doctrinal differences will still exist.

Each church plant needs to develop and adopt their statement of faith. It is best to have a fairly complete statement of faith early in the planting process. A good statement of faith is a thorough one.

If a church adopts a brief statement of faith, one with almost any evangelical can agree, what will help the church when small groups begin to divide over issues of Calvinism, Pentecostalism or women in ministry? A statement of faith will greatly

reduce the potential for conflict, because the members know in advance what the church believes.

Another reason for a comprehensive statement of faith is its use in guiding the church into the future. A constitution can infuse a church with DNA. If the constitution contains a statement of faith that has a strong, conservative, biblical doctrine, the statement can guide the church theologically even after the planter is gone. Consider how a constitution is used. It is sent to candidates for executive level staff positions, it is a critical piece of arbitration during conflict and it is reviewed before potential members join a new church.

What is our Form of Government?

As the congregation develops its constitution, it needs to consider the form of governance which supports its decision-making processes. A good place to start would be "What is 'The Church?'" The article "The Church" as contained in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 describes a Baptist church in the following way:

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

Congregational Polity

Congregational polity may be defined as "that form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision-making. This means that decisions about membership, leadership, doctrine, worship, conduct, missions, finances, property, relationships, and the like are to be made by the gathered congregation except when such decisions have been

delegated by the congregation to individual members or groups of members.” The intention of congregational polity is that the congregation governs itself under the lordship of Jesus Christ and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, under the delegated authority of pastors and deacons, but with no governing ecclesial bodies exerting authority over the church. All members participate in the decision-making process. The congregational polity of a church must embody democratic processes, be responsible to the lordship of Jesus Christ, and be guided by His authoritative word, the inerrant Scriptures.

Completing the Constitution

The founding document that will guide the church for the next several years needs just a few more things. First, it needs to outline the major, long-lasting relationships it intends to maintain. Most of the time, this is a denominational affiliation. Southern Baptist church plants should not only identify the local association they will maintain a relationship with, but they should also explain, within the constitution, how this affiliation gives the congregation Southern Baptist identity.

Explaining relationships like this will help non-Southern Baptist prospects and members better understand the “how” and “why” of what the church is doing. While explaining the relationship, it also makes sense to explain that being in a relationship is good for God’s Kingdom. Demonstrating the benefits will help someone who has an independent church background. Finally, it may even be worthwhile to clearly outline the beliefs the church expects from organizations that it is affiliated for those who have trouble trusting denominations.

The last thing needed is a section on how to amend the constitution. Usually, churches require either a 2/3s or a 3/4s majority vote in order to change the constitution, because it contains items that are core to the congregations beliefs; a statement of faith, mission statement, purpose statement, and the type of church government. Generally, the church doesn’t want these things to change. That is why the constitution should not include administrative bylaws.

Step 4

Crafting Bylaws

Bylaws define how the church will operate and carry out the mission that Christ has given it. Because Baptists are an autonomous group, there is not a right or wrong way to establish bylaws. Some churches choose to include them in the constitution and others prefer to have these administrative documents stand as an independent document. Bylaws that are not attached to the constitution seem to a better practice because:

-By keeping the administrative documents separate from the theological documents, each document is able to speak clearly. For example, when a prospective member reviews the church constitution they miss the theological statements the church is trying to make because they are trying to figure out membership requirements.

-By keeping the two separate, the DNA in the constitution is likely to withstand the test of time. Typically, when the constitution and the bylaws are separate, the congregation views the bylaws as a document that can be amended, and should be, amended as times change and better administrative practices are introduced. However, the constitution takes a larger majority to amend, and that is by intent. The constitution contains the church mission statement, purpose statement, statement of faith, and membership covenant.

Areas to Define

There are at least five areas of church life bylaws should clearly define; membership, officers, staff, standing committees, and time and place for church meetings. Some bylaws are much more proficient and describe immunity for officers and binding arbitration between members. While that is all well and good, an attorney may be needed to make sure that the bylaws are in compliance with what is possible in your state.

Do not get hung up on drafting fancy bylaws. Complex bylaws do not encourage church growth. Believe it or not, it is the smaller congregations that have the most complicated system of bylaws and governance. The opposite is

also true. Some extremely large congregations, like North Point Church in Alpharetta, Ga., have amazingly simple structures. Try to cover the five areas as simply as possible.

Membership

The Bible teaches, and Baptists believe, that only those who accepted Christ as their savior are part of the church. Therefore, a preliminary consideration for membership must be acceptance of Christ as the Lord. Baptists believe that since the Scriptures declare the outward manifestation of following Christ in salvation is baptism, then all members must have followed Christ in believer's baptism by immersion.

Membership requirements met by people who have previously accepted Christ, been baptized and are members of another local congregation, are allowed to join by statement of faith or transfer of letter.

Membership also defines how members who have fallen away from the membership covenant, or the teachings of Scripture, are encouraged to renew their faith through the process of church discipline. Some look at church discipline as a way to remove members who have not been living the life Christ has called them. It is encouraged to structure church discipline as a redemptive act. Support obedience that uses removal of a member as a last case scenario.

Membership practices are varied. However, the best practice is to distinguish between church members and voting members. Voting members should be active church members over 18 years of age. These parameters will help to limit controversy should a problem erupt.

Church Officers

Both the Baptist Faith and Message and The Ecclesiological Guides outline two offices in church life: pastors and deacons. The next section of the bylaws deals with choosing, administering the offices of and removing these men. Each of these passages must look to the Bible in order to guide the congregation with authority.

Pastor

The paragraphs guiding the work of the pastor should give an overview of the pastor's work, review how a pastor is replaced, should a vacancy occur, and how a pastor is removed when the need arises. It is not a place to write a job description for the pastor. It is not a place to govern what the pastor can, or can not, do. (I once saw a set of bylaws that stated the pastor could not work at Wal-Mart! It took a 2/3s majority vote of the membership to add this line into the bylaws.)

Deacons

These paragraphs should review how deacons are chosen, the ministry they are expected to perform and the manner they are to leave. The church should insist that all leaders live up to Biblical standards and require them to step down if they do not. Numbers of deacons per members, the deacon's rotational pattern and how leadership is determined within the deacon body, should be clearly outlined within the bylaws.

Other Officers

Trustees

There are legal officers in every corporation, and the church is no exception. The legal officers in the church are sometimes called the trustees because they are registered with state as agents authorized by the church to sign legal papers for the congregation. The three trustees have no power to buy, sale or transfer property without authorization of the church; however, with church action, their signature represents the will of the congregation.

Financial Secretary/Treasure

This is the person responsible for overseeing the financial transactions of the church. This person helps to ensure that proper procedures are in place to account for money, attribute that money correctly to donors, and, with the help of a stewardship team, disperse the money in accordance with the budgeted will of the church.

Clerk

The church clerk is the recording secretary for the church. They are responsible to keep up-to-date records on membership, actions taken by the church while in business session and maintain historical records. The clerk is also the person responsible for communicating to outside organizations, i.e. the convention, as to the size and growth rate in the church.

Moderator

The moderator is the person who governs over the business sessions of the congregation. Some churches have the senior pastor as the moderator by default. The downside to this is that it is hard to participate in the discussion when moderating the meeting. There are also times when the pastor is the subject of discussion and must hand over the gavel. No matter who is chosen, clear guidelines of succession should be given for when that officer is absent.

Church Staff

Good bylaws will not cause a church to grow; bad bylaws can prevent a church from growing. One of the biggest oversights that church planters make is not envisioning the day when church staff will need to be put in place. Bylaws that do not prepare for additional staff hurt a church in time of growth, because there is not a clearly understood path to take.

It is best to define how staff is chosen, who staff reports to and how staff salaries are handled. From the beginning, the senior pastor needs to have influence on the staff the church places around him. If well-constructed, the bylaws will allow that type of influence. Second, the staff will work to please whomever they feel they answer to. If the deacons have the power to terminate them and the senior pastor does not, then he will not be able to influence their ministry. Bylaws should give the senior pastor some control, though not complete, in the area of staff.

Finally, staff salaries can quickly sour when the youth minister finds out that the music man is making more money than him. Even if the plant cannot even afford a part-time administrative assistant, it is best to add a staff salary confidentiality statement. This is something that will be hard to incorporate if

added later. This will pay huge dividends when administrative assistants, ten years from now, are not able to compare pay stubs.

Church Meetings

Whatever you write in your bylaws becomes your minimum. By keeping that perspective you can avoid many headaches. For example, as the planter you may envision the church having quarterly business conferences. However, as a minimum standard, you can write that the church will have an annual meeting. This way, if there is not anything to meet about, there is not a need to have the meeting.

The same approach can be taken when it comes to establishing committees or ministry teams. Any team or policy mandated by the bylaws must be put into practice. A better approach is to use your bylaws to set standards for team members and team operations then, with flexibility, let the church establish and close ministry teams as the circumstances warrant. This way the church plant has a chance of staying fresh, on the cusp, and able to produce cutting-edge ministry.

Appendix A

(Sample Constitution)

_____ **Church**

We declare and establish this Constitution to preserve and secure the principles of our faith and to govern the body in a decent and orderly manner. This Constitution will preserve the liberties of each individual church member and the freedom of action of this body in relation to other churches.

Article I

Church Name

This body shall be known as _____ Church. The primary offices will be located at _____.

Article II

Mission Statement

In obedience to God, as a Christ-centered body of believers, we commit to disciple, enable and encourage one another to love, worship, and serve our Savior, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we commit to share the Good News and ourselves with our neighbors in _____ Church, in the surrounding communities, and throughout the world.

Article III

Our Purpose Statement

_____exists to obey God, expand the Kingdom, and change lives.
Five primary strategies are central to our success:

We exist for **Celebration** **Celebration** occurs every time we enter the presence of God. Scripture call this worship and there are many expressions of worship including: singing, commitment, praying, hearing the word of God, giving, baptism, meditating, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. (Matthew 4:10, John 4:23-24)

We exist to **Change Lives** **Evangelism** is the communication of God's word to a lost world. The Bible declares that God is not willing for anyone to perish and that God's desire is for His house to be full. The Bible places the responsibility of evangelism on the church. "His intent was that **through the church**, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known." (Ephesians 3:10, II Peter 3:9)

We exist for **Service** **Ministry** is the hands on demonstration of Christianity to one another and to the community we serve. God has put a high priority on ministry. The Bible says, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples-that you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

We exist for **Discipleship** **Discipleship** is the education of God's people in God's word. Discipleship brings about fulfillment and maturity in the church. "Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity." (Hebrews 6:1)

We exist for **Prayer**

The first thing the early church did when they assembled was **pray** together. Prayer is the fuel that drives the ambitious priorities of the church and the spiritual power that changes the world. Christ demonstrated the power of prayer by making it a priority of His earthly ministry. If the Church is going to be effective, it must pray. (Acts 1:14, John 17, I Peter 5:7)

Article IV

Our Statement of Faith

These are the core beliefs of the membership of _____ Church. This Statement of Faith is in harmony with the Baptist Faith and Message of 2000. Article III (2)

About God,

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has eternally existed in three personalities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God. (Genesis 1:1,26, 27; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; I Peter 1:2)

About Jesus Christ,

Jesus is the Son of God. He lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on the cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to Heaven's glory, and is coming again soon as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to redeem His bride, the church. (Matthew 1:22,23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14,15; 1 Corinthians 15:3,4; Romans 1:3,4; Acts 1:9-11; I Timothy 6:14,15; Titus 2:13)

About the Holy Spirit,

The Holy Spirit is co-equal with the Father and the Son. He is present in the world to make man aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation. He provides the Christian with the power for living, enables understanding of Biblical truth, and guides them in righteous living. He provides every Christian with spiritual gifts for service at the moment of salvation. We seek to live under His control daily. (2 Corinthians 3:17, John 16:7-13, 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; I Corinthians 2:12, 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18)

About the Bible,

The Bible is God's word to us. It was written by human authors who were under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the supreme source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. The 66 canonical books, as they were originally written, are inspired by God; and are the truth without any mixture of error. (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1: 20-21, 2 Timothy 1:13; Psalm 119:150, 160, 12:6; Proverbs 30:5)

About Human Beings,

People are the supreme object of God's creation, created in the image of God. Although every person has potential for good, all of us are marred by our own attitude and acts of disobedience against God, called "sin". By one man (Adam), sin entered into the world, and death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. This separates people from God and causes spiritual death along with many other problems in life. (Genesis 1:27, Psalm 8:3-6, 51: 1-8, Romans 3:23, Romans 5:12, Isaiah 59:1-2)

About Salvation,

Salvation is by grace through faith; and is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. We can never make up for our sin by self-improvement; or good works. Only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness can anyone be saved from sin's penalty. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Eternal life begins the moment one receives Jesus Christ into his life by faith. (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9, John 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26, Romans 5:1)

About Eternal Security,

Because God gives us eternal life through Jesus Christ, the true believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. Once born again, you cannot lose your salvation. Salvation is sustained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. (John 10:29; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25, 10:10,14; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

About Eternity,

Heaven is a literal place where God will wipe away every tear and there will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain. Believers will live forever in God's presence. We also, believe in a literal hell, which is a place of physical and spiritual torment, experienced as a result of eternal separation form God. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (John 3:16; John 14:7; Romans 6:23; Romans 8:17-18; Revelation 20:15, 1Thessalonians 4:16-17)

About the Church,

We believe that the true church is composed of all who have been saved through faith in Jesus Christ. We also believe members of the true Church, which is the bride of Christ, are eligible for membership in the local church. God primarily ministers on earth through the local church. Christ is the head of the church, not any person, group, or religious organization. While recognizing the value of associating and cooperating with other groups of Christians, we believe that the local church should be independent, self-governing, and free from any denominational control. (Matthew 16:18; I Corinthians 12:12-14; Hebrews 10:25; Colossians 1:18)

About the Christian Home,

We believe that God has given parents the responsibility to bring their children up in the nurture and discipline of the Lord. We believe that it is the parents responsibility to educate and disciple their children in the truth of God. We believe that the church must work to compliment the parent's efforts and facilitate Godly living within the home. (Ephesians 6:4, Proverbs 22:6, Dueteronomy 6:6-9, Joshua 24:15)

About Baptism and the Lord's Supper,

Jesus instructed His disciple to remember His death and resurrection. He gave the Church two visible symbols (called "ordinances") as reminders. These two ordinances are baptism and the Lord's Supper. While we respect all acts of spiritual obedience the Bible teaches that Baptism is to be done by immersion, following salvation, as a one-time act of obedience and identification with Jesus Christ as Lord. The Lord's Supper is an ongoing symbol remembering our Lord's death, burial, resurrection and promised return. Each individual must decide their own participation in these ordinances. Regardless, we do not regard anyone's participation in these practices as a means of salvation. (Matthew 28:18-20, 26:26-29; I Corinthians 11:23-32, Colossians 2:12)

About the Christian Life,

We believe that God calls us – with a holy calling -- to walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. God wants us to live in the power of His indwelling Holy Spirit, so we will not fulfill the lusts of our physical bodies. We believe that the fallen, Adamic nature of the flesh cannot be eradicated in this life. Therefore, keeping ourselves constantly in subjection to Christ, we must allow God's Holy Spirit to live through us in a daily "walk" of faith. Otherwise, the flesh will certainly demonstrate its presence in our lives, to the Lord's dishonor. It is the responsibility and privilege of every Christian to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ and to seek and to make growing disciples. (Leviticus 26:30, Philippians 2:13, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Peter 3:15, Galatians 5:16)

Article V

Membership Covenant

As a member of _____ Church, having made profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and been scripturally baptized, I do covenant before God as I am enabled by His Holy Spirit to:

- Live my life under the Lordship of Jesus Christ in every area.
- Accept the Word of God as my authority for faith and every day living.
- Follow and be equipped for service by the church leadership as they are led by the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Word of God.
- Maintain the unity of the Body by acting in love toward other members and finding my place of service within this part of the Body of Christ.

Article VI

Polity and Relationships

The government of this church is vested in the body of believers who compose it. All internal groups created by and empowered by the church shall report to and be held accountable to the church membership unless specific action is taken by church membership as outlined in the bylaws.

Article VII

Affiliation

_____ Church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of any denominational control. However, the Bible teaches that local churches should seek voluntary fellowship with other doctrinally sound churches. This association is to provide help and encouragement while working together as the Lord directs. This is a voluntary association that in no way *involves the surrender of the individual church's freedom or dependence on God.*

_____ Church has chosen to affiliate itself with the Southern Baptist Convention through the _____ association. We continue this relationship,

believing that it is God's will to do so. Fundamental to this affiliation is the understanding that the Southern Baptist Convention is a fellowship of autonomous, biblically sound churches that choose to work together to further God's Kingdom. Voluntary contributions to local, state, national, and international mission's projects maintain this affiliation. Support may also be provided by sending messengers to the associational, state, and annual convention for voting on doctrinal, ethical, and procedural positions. (Acts 15:2; 21:17-18; III John 10; Philippians 4:15, 18; I John 1:3; Ephesians 4:3-6)

Article VI

Conducting Church Affairs

The conduct of the affairs of _____ Church not addressed in the Articles of Incorporation or this Constitution will be outlined in the bylaws of _____ Church Inc. These bylaws define the church's organizational structure, the rights of members in the structure, and the procedures by which these rights may be exercised.

Article VII

Amendments to the Constitution

This Constitution or any of its provisions may be altered, amended, or repealed, and a new constitution may be adopted at any time with an affirmation of change, as reflected by a two-thirds (2/3) vote at any special or regular business meeting at which a quorum is present, all as further defined in the bylaws of _____ Church, Inc.

Appendix B

(Sample Service for Constituting a New Church)

Coming Into God's Presence

Reading of Scripture

Call to Worship

*Come, Now is the Time to Worship
(B. Darken)*

Prayer

Why We Are Here

Testimony of Changed Life

Doing God's Work

Call to Order

Planting Pastor/Moderator

Report from Church Plant Leadership

Why We Should Constitute

Report from Planting Partners

Progress We've Seen

Adoption of Constitution and Bylaws

Moderator

Election of Officers

Moderator

Call of Pastor

Moderator

Signing of Membership Charter

Charter Members

Transfer of Property and Assets

Representative of Sponsor Church

Celebrating God's Church

Song of Celebration

*God is Good, All the Time
(D. Moen)*

Song of Praise

Amazing Grace

Charge to the Church

Song of Commitment

*Awesome is the Lord Most High
(Chris Tomlin)*

Offering

Announcements

Benediction Prayer

Fellowship Celebration

Appendix C

(Sample ByLaws)

Article I. Church Membership**Section 1. General**

This is a sovereign Baptist church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The membership retains unto it's the right of exclusive self-government in all phases of the spiritual and temporal life of this church.

Membership in this church shall consist of all persons who have met the requirements for membership, as provided in Article I, Section 2, been approved by the congregation, and are listed on the membership roll.

Section 2. Candidacy

Any person may offer himself as a candidate for membership in this church. Persons offering themselves for membership shall be required to complete a New Member Class.

- (1) By profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and Scriptural baptism, or
- (2) By promise of a letter of recommendation from another Baptist church of like faith and practice, or
- (3) By statement of prior conversion experience and Scriptural baptism, or
- (4) For Scriptural baptism from another denomination, or
- (5) By restoration as provided in Article I, Section 6.

A three-fourths vote of those church members present and voting shall be required to elect such candidates to membership. Any dissent shall be resolved according to Article I, Section 6 of these bylaws.

Section 3. Responsibilities of Members

In order to be a responsible member _____ Church, members must:

- (1) Be in basic agreement with the church’s statement of faith and purpose.
- (2) Discover, develop and deploy their spiritual gifts in the ministries of the church.
- 3) Be diligent to live according to the statements of the church covenant.
- (4) Be faithful in attendance to worship services and Bible study.
- (5) Become a student of the Word of God and of prayer.
- (6) Make a commitment to personal evangelism and discipleship.
- 7) Encourage scriptural stewardship of time, talents, and tithes, and offerings.

Section 4. Voting Responsibilities of Members

Only active members of the church, over 18 years of age, are entitled to vote on questions submitted to the church in conference. An inactive member is defined as a member whose predominant attendance is at another church, or a member who has not attended the church in three months with exceptions to those members who are homebound due to medical reasons or age. Members must be present to vote. Any questions of eligibility will be referred to the church clerk.

Section 5. Termination of Membership

Membership shall be terminated in the following ways:

- (1) By death.
- (2) By dismissal to another Baptist church.
- (3) By disciplinary action of this church as provided in Article I, Section 6.
- (4) By joining with a church of another denomination.
- (5) By personal request for name to be removed from church membership.

Note: Letters of dismissal shall be granted only to other churches of like faith and order and not to individual members requesting termination of membership.

Section 6. Discipline

It shall be the basic purpose of _____ Church to emphasize to its members that every reasonable measure will be taken to assist any troubled member. The senior pastor, other members of the church staff, and deacons are available for counsel and guidance. Reconciliation rather than punishment should be the guideline that governs the attitude of one member toward another.

Should some serious condition exist which would cause a member to become a liability to the general welfare of the church, every reasonable measure will be taken by senior teaching pastor and by the deacons to resolve the problem in accordance with Matthew 18:15-35, I Corinthians 5:1-13, II Corinthians 2:1-11.

All such proceedings shall be pervaded by a spirit of Christian kindness and forbearance. If it is determined that the welfare of the church will best be served by the exclusion of the member, the church may take this action by a two-thirds vote of the members present at a meeting called for this purpose; and the church may proceed to declare the offender to be no longer in the membership of the church.

Any person whose membership has been terminated for any condition which has made it necessary for the church to exclude him may upon his request be restored to membership by the recommendation pastor and deacons and an affirmation vote of the church upon evidence of his repentance and reformation.

Article II. Church Officers and Ministry Teams

Section 1. Senior Pastor

The senior pastor, is responsible for leading the church to function as a New Testament church. The senior pastor is the under-shepherd of the church in divine worship, aggressive evangelism, deliberate discipleship, and compassionate ministry. As such, he will lead the congregation, the organizations, and the pastoral staff to perform their tasks. The pastor will counsel with the deacon fellowship and be responsible to the church.

In the pursuit of a new senior pastor the deacons, in cooperation with the Nominating Team, shall select a Pulpit Team to seek out a pastor, and its recommendation will constitute a nomination. The Affirmation of the senior teaching pastor shall be at a duly called meeting in accordance with Article III, Sections 2 and 3. Upon the recommendation of the deacons the church membership shall have an affirmation vote at a duly called meeting in accordance with Article III, Sections 2 and 3. The Pulpit Team shall bring to the consideration of the church only one name at a time. Election shall be by secret ballot with an affirmative vote of eighty-five percent (85%) of those members present being necessary for a call. After consideration of this vote the Pulpit Team shall proceed with the call of the senior pastor. The senior pastor, thus elected shall serve until the relationship is terminated by his request or the church's dismissal action as provided herein.

Upon the resignation of the senior pastor, a new senior pastor shall be called according to the process as outlined above.

The senior pastor shall give at least two weeks notice at the time of resignation before terminating his responsibilities as pastor.

The church may declare the office of senior pastor vacant. Such action shall take place at a meeting called for that purpose, of which the membership has been given two weeks written notice. The meeting may be called upon recommendation by the deacon fellowship and the Personnel Team. The vice-moderator shall preside at the meeting. The vote to declare the office vacant shall be by secret ballot. A quorum of at least 51% of the church membership eligible to vote as provided in Article 1, Section 4, must be present in order to declare the office of the senior teaching pastor vacant. An affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of the members present shall be necessary to declare the office vacant. If the membership votes the office vacant, the termination of pastoral duties shall be effective immediately upon publication of the results of the vote. The leadership of the church council will determine a fair separation package; in rare cases will less than 30 days salary be honored. If the affirmative does not prevail, the same question cannot be presented to the church until the lapse of at least three (3) months from the date of the vote. Any written results of the vote. The leadership of the church council will determine a fair separation package; in rare cases will less than 30 days salary be honored. If the affirmative does not prevail, the same question cannot be presented to the church until the lapse of at least three (3) months from the date of the vote.

Any written agreements entered into between the church and pastor shall be honored by the church regardless of the nature of the termination of the relationship.

Section 2. Church Staff

The church staff shall include both pastoral staff and non-pastoral staff members.

All pastoral staff members shall be recommended to the church by the deacon fellowship and the Personnel Team and employed by church action. All pastoral staff members will be directly responsible to the senior pastor.

At the time of resignation by a pastoral staff member, at least two (2) weeks notice shall be given to the church.

The church may terminate a pastoral staff member by majority vote upon the recommendation of the deacon fellowship and the personnel team. The termination of the duties shall be effective immediately upon publication of the outcome of the vote. Compensation shall continue for thirty (30) days after written notice is given to the pastoral staff member at which time termination shall be complete.

To maintain good working relationships, all ministry staff and support staff salaries will be kept confidential. Members requesting to know the amount of a staff and salary can obtain that information from a member of the finance ministry team.

The senior teaching pastor and the personnel team shall have the authority to employ and terminate approved and budgeted non-pastoral staff members. Such employment and termination of services shall be with the recommendation of the immediate supervising staff member and, as appropriate, with consultation of related teams or councils of the church.

Section 3. Deacon Ministry Fellowship

In accordance with the meaning of the work and the practice of the New Testament, deacons are to be servants of the church. The task of the deacon is to serve with the pastor and staff in performing pastoral ministry tasks; proclaim the gospel to unbelievers; care for church members and other persons in the community; lead the church to achieve its mission.

The deacons shall serve on a rotation basis for terms of three (3) years. Shorter terms may be set for deacons newly elected for fulfillment of uncompleted terms and to prevent an unbalanced number of members from rotating off in the same year. Members serving less than two (2) years may be re-elected for an additional full term. After serving a term of three years, a deacon shall be eligible for re-election only after the lapse of at least one year. There is no obligation to constitute as an active deacon, a person who comes to the church from another church where he has served as a deacon.

DEACON QUALIFICATIONS

Deacon must:

- Be born again of the Spirit of God and willing to give and live his Christian testimony before the church membership and the world.
- Believe that the Bible is the infallible, inerrant Word of God, and subscribe to the Articles of Faith of _____ Church.
- Believe that it is every Christian's responsibility to be a personal soul winner and to lead the church in outreach visitation.
- Believe that it is the obligation of every Christian to obey the Great Commission as found in Matthew 28:19-20.
- Believe in and practice tithing as a minimum expression of our love for God through the church.
- Not have any serious domestic troubles and not have been divorced. He must know how to rule his own home well before becoming a leader in his church.
- Know, along with his wife, how to hold their tongues against spreading gossip or talking critically about others.
- Not to be involved in gambling.
- Handle his own business affairs in a way that is above reproach, possessing a good name among the people of his community.
- Have a teachable spirit to learn and apply the Scriptures to his life.

- Try to put down murmuring and complaining as he would smother a fire, facing them frankly, dealing with them fairly and stand loyally with the majority of the church in their decisions.
- Be willing to serve when service is needed, to the best of his ability. He should be willing to work at an assigned task conscientiously, and if he is unable to carry out the assignment, will so indicate and resign the responsibility. He will resign from his position if he cannot or will not carry out his responsibilities as an elected deacon.
- Attend the services of his church, supporting them with his good will, presence, prayers and contributions.
- Keep the observance of the Lord's Day above reproach.
- Be an active male member of _____church, and be at least twenty-one years of age; a mature follower of Christ.
- Have been a member of _____Church for at least one year.

Section 4. Moderator

The moderator shall be the senior pastor. In the absence of the senior teaching pastor, any member of the fellowship of deacons chosen by the senior pastor shall serve. In there is a vacancy in the position of senior pastor, then the chairman of the fellowship of elders shall serve as the moderator.

Section 5. Clerk

The church shall elect a clerk by ballot annually. The nominating team will present qualified names for consideration at the annual meeting.

Section 6. Treasurer

The church shall elect a church treasurer by ballot every three years. It shall be the duty of the treasurer to have the oversight responsibilities to receive, preserve, and pay out, upon receipt of vouchers, approved and signed by authorized personnel, monies, or things of value paid or given to the church, keeping at all times an itemized account of all receipts and disbursements.

The treasurer shall make available such records as deemed necessary by the Finance Team, to provide for an annual certified audit.

The nominating team will produce qualified names for consideration at the annual meeting.

Section 7. Trustees

Three trustees, one-third(1/3) of whom shall be appointed by the church annually to serve for three years, and, until their successors shall be appointed, will hold in trust the property of the church. They shall have no power to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, or transfer any real property without a specific vote of the church authorizing each action. It shall be the function of the trustees to affix their signatures to legal documents involving the sale, mortgaging, purchase or rental of property or other legal documents where the signatures of trustees are required. The trustees will serve as the officers of the corporation.

Should a trustee be unable to complete the term of office, a successor will be appointed to serve the remainder of the term. Should the remaining term be less than one year, the successor will be eligible for appointment for an additional term of office. Should the remaining term be greater than one year, the successor may not be elected to a successive term.

Only one active deacon may serve as a trustee. An elder shall not serve as trustee.

The nominating team will provide qualified names for church consideration at the annual meeting. The senior pastor in cooperation with the fellowship of deacons will appoint a replacement in the case of an unexpected vacancy.

Section 8. Church Ministry Teams

A Nominating Team will be selected by the senior teaching pastor and deacon fellowship. The Nominating Team shall consist of not less than seven (7) members, no more than one-third (1/3) of which, but not less than one of which are active deacons.

Unless otherwise specifically provided by church policy, all teams shall be nominated by the Nominating Team and approved by the congregation to serve for a period of three (3) years on a rotational basis. Team members who have served for a three (3) year term shall not be nominated to succeed themselves on the same team until the expiration of one year unless otherwise stated herein. The Nominating Team shall specify the number of members for each team. The chairman of a team may not serve as a chairman for any other team.

Teams are responsible for electing their officers and establishing operating guidelines. All teams shall be responsible to the church; however all recommendations to the church shall be evaluated by the church council in terms of church goals and objectives. All teams shall bring reports to the church council and deacon fellowship at any time they deem it helpful or when they request such report.

The senior pastor, as well, or his representative from church staff or the deacon fellowship, shall be an ex officio non-voting member of all ministry teams. (An Operations Manual will list all teams, responsibilities, and procedures for the selection and election of team members.)

Each team shall record minutes of each meeting and make the minutes available as historical records of the church.

Section 9. Church Council

The primary functions of the church council shall be recommending to the senior pastor and church staff suggested church goals and objectives; review and coordinate program plans recommended by the church pastoral and administrative staff, church officers, organizations, and teams; maintain the church calendar; evaluate programs achievements in terms of church goals and objectives; communicate the above to the membership; and make certain that the constitution and bylaws are followed.

The church council will designate a regular meeting time within each calendar quarter and will meet at that time. The following, shall be members of the church council: the ministerial and pastoral staff, chairman of the deacon fellowship, Bible study directors, finance team leader, and outreach team leader. Other members may be added by the election of the church council. Any team leader, or their designated representative, may attend a church council meeting at any time. The senior pastor, or his designated representative, will serve as the chairman of the church council.

The church council will review all recommendations of the church proposed by any team or any group having representation on the church council. An evaluation of the recommendations in terms of church goals and objectives will be made. The church council will also be available to perform this function for any individual, group, or the entire church body upon request.

An annual report shall be given by the church council to the church in conference during the first quarter of the calendar year. This report shall include a statement of church goals and objectives, an evaluation of programs achievements in terms of church goals and objectives, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the constitution and bylaws, and recommendations for changes in church programs and organization which will move the church toward the recommended church goals and objectives.

Articles III. Church Meetings

Section 1. Worship Services

The church shall meet regularly at least each Sunday morning, for preaching, instruction, evangelism, and for the worship of Almighty God. Any other church meetings, which will be essential in the promotion of the objectives of the church, shall be placed on the church calendar. These meetings will be open for the entire membership of the church and for all people.

Section 2. Church Conference

The business of the church shall be conducted through two types of meetings:

The Annual Church Conference

The church will assemble each year on or about two months prior to the end of the fiscal year to approve the budget for the coming year, hear reports from any teams, organizations and ministries of the church, conduct miscellaneous business as needed, and pray for the church.

Special Church Conference

The church will assemble for conference upon the request of the senior pastor, fellowship of deacons, or the church council. Any church member may submit a request to the church council for a special conference.

Special church conference will be announced two weeks prior to the date of the conference through the service announcements and any publication mailed to members. On rare occasion an emergency may arise making the two-week notice impractical.

Section 3. Quorum

The quorum consists of those who attend the church conference, provided it is a stated meeting or one that has been properly called.

The only exceptions would be in the event:

- Action was being proposed to declare the office of senior teaching pastor vacant as provided in Article II. Section II or
- Action was being proposed to fill the office of senior teaching pastor as provided in Article II., Section 2.

In cases (2) and (3), a quorum shall be not less than ten percent (10%) of the total membership eligible for voting as provided in Article 1, Section IV.

Section 4. Parliamentary Rules

Roberts' Rules of Order, Revised, is the authority for parliamentary rules of procedure for all church conferences. The moderator shall select a parliamentarian.

Section 5. Fiscal Year

The fiscal year of the church shall begin on September 1 and end August 31 or the following calendar year.

Article IV. Ordinances

Section 1. Baptism

A person who receives Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior by personal faith who professes Him publicly at any worship service; and who indicates a commitment to follow Christ as Lord, shall be received for baptism.

- Baptism shall be by immersion in water.
- Baptism shall be administered by the pastor or whomever the church shall authorize.

- Baptism shall be administered as an act of worship during any service called for that purpose.

Section 2. The Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and fruit of the vine, commemorate the death of Jesus Christ and anticipate His second coming.

- The Lord’s Supper shall be observed at least quarterly, preferably the first Sunday of the quarter, or as otherwise scheduled. The Lord’s Supper shall be observed in the Sunday morning or any other service deemed appropriate.
- The pastor and deacons shall be responsible for the administration of the Lord’s Supper.
- The deacons shall be responsible for the physical preparations of the Lord’s Supper.

Article V. Designated Funds

All donations accepted by the church will be allocated to the general fund unless it is designated to an established designated fund. Procedures for establishing designated funds will be published by the finance team.

Article VI. Amendments

It is the responsibility of the senior pastor, staff and church council to review the constitution and bylaws, proposing any revisions or adjustments necessary to maintain their effectiveness, and to bring these changes to the church in church conference.

New bylaws may be adopted or these bylaws may be amended or repealed by the affirmative vote of a two-thirds (2/3) majority of votes cast at a meeting called for such purpose.

The church membership shall be given two weeks advance notice of the time of such meeting. Further, a copy of the proposed changes shall be made available to members at two consecutive weeks of Sunday morning worship services in advance of the meeting.(5)

340 Children's Training Materials \$ _____

Church Staff

401 Planter/Pastor Salary \$ _____

402 Planter/Pastor Housing \$ _____

403 Planter/Pastor Benefits (Health) \$ _____

404 Planter/Pastor Benefits (Annuity) \$ _____

405 Planter/Pastor Travel \$ _____

(\$__ per mile up to _____ miles per year)

410 Administrative Assistant \$ _____

412 Payroll/Workmen's Comp/Assistant \$ _____

Facilities/Maintenance

501 Telephone \$ _____

502 Internet/Web page \$ _____

503 Office/Computer Equipment Lease \$ _____

504 Computer Software \$ _____

505 Computer Upgrades \$ _____

510 Meeting Place Rental \$ _____

520 Storage Space Rental \$ _____

550 Insurances: Liability \$ _____

560 Copy write Licensing \$ _____

570 Legal Fees \$ _____

600 Contingency \$ _____

Total Projected Expenses \$ _____

Average Weekly Offering \$ _____

Sources:

- (1) Ecclesiological Guides for Southern Baptist Church Planters
- (2) North Lanier Baptist Church Constitution
- (3) Redford, Jack. *Planting Healthy Churches*. Nashville, TN. Broadman Press, 1978
- (4) Baptist Faith and Message, 2000
- (5) North Lanier Baptist Church, ByLaws
- (6) Garrett, "The Congregation-led Church: Congregational Polity," in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, eds. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Pub., 2004), 157.
- (7) Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical and Evangelical*, vol. 2 (2nd. Ed.: North Richland Hills, TX.: BIBAL
- (8) "Seven Guidelines for Church Planting with Reflect Baptist Ecclesiology," the Theological Studies Division, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas, September, 2004.