

Constitution

Ridgecrest Reformed Baptist Church

dba Cornerstone Bible Church, Ridgecrest, CA

PREAMBLE

We, the members of Cornerstone Bible Church, in the fear of God and desiring the glory of Jesus Christ alone, do ordain and establish this church constitution, to which we voluntarily and solemnly submit ourselves.

ARTICLE 1: NAME

The name of this church shall be “Cornerstone Bible Church.” The word “Cornerstone” signifies our commitment to being a Christ-centered church. Jesus Christ is the “chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame” (1 Peter 2:6). We are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:20). Therefore, the main tenet of our faith and the main point of all our church ministries shall be “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

The word “Bible” signifies our commitment to base our beliefs and practices on the teachings of the Bible, which we hold to be the only authoritative, inerrant, infallible and sufficient Word of God.

ARTICLE 2: MISSION

Cornerstone Bible Church of Ridgecrest is a Gospel-centered community committed to exalting God, equipping the saints, and evangelizing the lost. God’s purpose in establishing this local expression of the body of Christ is that His manifold wisdom, which He demonstrated in Christ Jesus our Lord, shall be made known (Ephesians 3:10). In response, we purpose to glorify God in the following mutually supportive ways, as directed by the Holy Scriptures:

- Worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:24; Acts 2:42);
- Serve one another by exercising spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12:4-7; Eph. 4:11-16);
- Proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the world (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:18-20);
- Live to the Glory of God in all spheres of life (Matthew 5:13-16; Jeremiah 29:7; 1 Corinthians 10:31).

ARTICLE 3: CORE VALUES

The following eight core values are the principles that are most important in defining who we are and what we are all about as a church:

- **The authority and sufficiency of the Bible.** Because the Bible is God’s Word, we are committed to believing whatever the Bible teaches, obeying whatever the Bible commands, and getting as much of the Bible into as many hearts as we can. We seek to put the Bible to good use in our worship services, our church ministries, and our personal lives (Deut. 12:32; Ps. 19:7-11; Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 20:20, 27; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 3:16-4:2).
- **A high view of God.** Our main purpose as individuals and as a church is to glorify and enjoy the God of the Bible. Therefore, we will promote a high view of God by emphasizing the theology of the Bible and by encouraging people to walk with God and to grow in their knowledge of God (Lev. 10:3; Ps. 16:11; 73:25-26; Is. 6:3-5; 57:15; Jer. 10:10; 31:34; Dan. 11:32; Jn. 17:3; Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:28; 2 Pet. 3:18; Rev. 4:8, 11).
- **Loving concern for the well-being of other people.** Christianity is a truth-based faith that is lived out in the real world with real people. We are committed, therefore, to showing the love of Christ to people in our church, community, nation, and world by sharing the gospel, our wealth, and ourselves (Mark 12:31; 2 Cor. 5:14; Gal. 5:14; 1 Jn. 3:16-19).

- **The centrality of the gospel of grace.** The gospel (good news) about the person and work of Jesus Christ is the main point of the Bible. It is the main message that God has given the church. Therefore, as a church we will center-up on the gospel as the only message of salvation, the key to the Christian life, and the foundation of Christian unity (Acts 20:24; Rom. 3:21-22; 1 Cor. 2:2; 15:3; Gal. 1:8-9; 2:20; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:5-6).
- **Gospel growth.** With God's blessing, the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ produces the conversion of sinners and the spiritual growth of Christians. We are committed, therefore, to be on the advance with the gospel in our community and to the ends of the earth by equipping the saints for their role in making and growing disciples wherever the Lord sends them and by participating with other churches and ministries in gospel-promoting endeavors (Matt. 16:18; 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 13:1-3; Rom. 10:14-15; 1 Cor. 9:19-23; Eph. 4:11, 15-16; Col 1:5-6; 1 Pet. 3:15).
- **God-centered, people-edifying worship.** As the temple of the Holy Spirit, the church is called to assemble together in order to proclaim the infinite worth of God to receive our love, obedience, and praise in a manner that also builds up God's people. Therefore, our Lord's Day worship services will be centered on God and conducted in language and style that are intelligible and engaging to people in our community (Ps. 37:4; 96:7-8; Matt. 4:10; Jn. 4:23-24; Rom. 1:23-25; 1 Cor. 9:22; 14:15-16; Eph. 4:11-12; Col. 3:11; Rev. 4:11).
- **Christian fellowship.** As Christians we are called to share our lives in community with other disciples. Therefore, we will promote Christian fellowship where the gospel is displayed, the one-another's of the New Testament are lived out, and each member of the body of Christ is cared for (Jn. 13:35; 15:12-13; Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; 2 Cor. 6:14; Gal. 6:2; Col. 3:12-15; 1 Jn. 1:3; 3:16; 4:7-11).
- **Dependence on God.** Without Christ, we can do nothing. Therefore, we will express our dependence on God through our words, attitudes, and the central place of prayer in our church life (Ps. 127:1; Matt. 21:13; Mk. 9:29; Lk. 11:1; Jn. 15:5; Col. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-2; Jam. 4:2).

ARTICLE 4: AFFILIATION

4.1 AUTHORITY. We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ who is Head of the Church (Eph. 5:23) and who directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture (Acts 14:21-23; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand under the authority of Jesus Christ and the word of Christ as under-shepherds.

4.2 INDEPENDENCE. The church may and does cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern (2 Cor.1:11; 8:18-24; Phil.4:15-19). We may seek the assistance and counsel (Prov. 11:14; 18:1) of other churches in matters of special concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church (Acts 14: 21-23).

4.3 ASSOCIATIONS. One special kind of fellowship and cooperation with other churches is formal membership in an association of churches. Upon recommendation of the elders, such affiliations may be entered into with the expressed consent and approval of the congregation (Acts 15:22, 2 Cor. 8:19). Withdrawal from such associations may be accomplished by the same procedure.

ARTICLE 5: STATEMENT OF FAITH

Cornerstone Bible Church's Statement of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the infallible, authoritative Word of God, is the final authority concerning all matters of truth, morality, and conduct. We also recognize the value throughout church history of creeds and confessions as man-made tools for articulating historic, Christian doctrine and exposing false teaching (2 Cor. 11:4; Gal. 1:8-9; Eph. 4:14; 1 Tim. 3:15; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:1-9, 16; 4:3; 2 Pet. 2:1, 3; 1 Jn. 4:1; Jude 1:3). For purposes of Cornerstone Bible Church's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, the Elders are the final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application. The following Statement of Faith is a summary of our understanding of the major doctrines of the Bible and is consistent with the main points of Reformed theology, particularly the *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*.

5.1 THE TRI-UNE GOD. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another (Deut. 6:4; Is. 42:1; Matt. 11:27; 17:5; 28:19; Jn. 1:1, 18; 3:35; 17:5, 23-24, 26; 1 Cor. 2:10; 2 Cor. 13:14). This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in His love and in His holiness (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 147:5; Is. 6:3; Jer. 10:10; 1 Jn. 4:16). He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration (Rom. 11:36; Col. 1:16-18; Rev. 4:11). Immortal and eternal, He perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about His eternal good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore His fallen creation, to the praise of His glorious grace (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 135:6; Is. 46:10-11; Dan. 4:35; Rom. 8:18-23, 28-29; Eph. 1:4-6, 11; 1 Tim. 1:7).

5.2. REVELATION. God has graciously disclosed His existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of His Son, the incarnate Word (Ps. 19:1; Jn. 1:1, 14, 18; Rom. 1:20; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by His Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: We believe that the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, are God-breathed and are both record and means of His saving work in the world (Gen. Ch. 1; 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:16; Heb. 1:1-3; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23). These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of His will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks (Jn. 14:26; Eph. 2:20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Jude 1:3; Rev. 22:18-19). The Bible, because it is God-breathed, is infallible and inerrant in all its parts and is, therefore, trustworthy in all that it affirms concerning history, science, doctrine, ethics, religious practice, or any other topic (Ps. 19:7-9; Jn. 10:35; 17:17; 2 Tim. 3:16). We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly (Deut. 29:29; Is. 55:8-9; Jn. 8:32; Rom. 10:8; 11:33-34; 2 Tim. 1:12; 3:16). As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel (John 10:27; Acts 1:8; Eph. 4:11-12). Believers are indwelt, taught, and led by the Holy Spirit in ways that are consistent with the objective revelation of God's will in the Bible (Jn. 6:45; 14:17; Acts 17:11; Rom. 8:9, 14; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 1 Jn. 1:20, 27).

5.3. CREATION. Our fundamental relationship with God is that of creature to Creator (Ps. 100:3). The work of creation is God's making all things of nothing, by the word of His power, in the space of six days, and all very good (Gen. Ch. 1; Ex. 20:11; Heb. 1:3; Rev. 4:11). The pinnacle of God's work of creation was humankind, whom God made male and female, in His own image, not through a long process of evolution, but by a special act of creation (Gen. 1:26-27; Mark 10:6). The first human beings, Adam and Eve, belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker (Gen 1:28, 31; Ps. 73:25-26; Eccl. 7:29; 12:1, 13-14). Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life (Gen. 12:2; Micah 6:8; Matt. 16:24; 20:28; Gal. 3:28; 5:13-14; Col. 3:11; 1 Pet. 3:7). In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-33). In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God (Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:1-2; Eph. 4:11-12; Phil. 4:3). The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments (1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:12-14; 3:1-7).

5.4 THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE. We believe in the sanctity of all human life, that it is created by God in His image, and is of inestimable worth. This is true for pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and during every other stage or condition of human life from conception through natural death. We are also called to defend, protect, and value all human life, consistent with Biblical imperatives (Psalm 139).

5.5. THE FALL. We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan’s temptation (Gen. Ch. 3; Rom. 5:12, 19; 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:21). As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God’s own gracious intervention (Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Jer. 17:9; Rom. 3:10-18; Eph. 2:1-9; 4:17-18; Col. 1:21-22). The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself (Matt. 16:26; Rom. 5:8-11; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Pet. 1:3).

5.6. THE PLAN OF GOD. We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them (Eph. 1:3-11; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 2 Tim. 1:9; Rev. 7:9-10). We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that He will one day glorify them—all to the praise of His glorious grace (Jn. 6:37-40; Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:6). In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set His saving love on those He has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer (Luke 24:47; John 17:2, 6, 9, 11-12, 19; Acts 13:48; 17:30; Rom. 11:5; Eph. 1:22; Col. 1:18).

5.7. THE GOSPEL. We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God’s very wisdom (Mark 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:21-24, 30). This good news is utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved. The gospel is Christ-centered, focused on the cross and resurrection: The gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if His death and resurrection are not central (the message is: “Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised”) (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18-24; 15:1-4). This good news is biblical (His death and resurrection are according to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved) (1 Cor. 15:3, 11-19; Gal. 1:4; 2:20).

5.8. THE REDEMPTION OF CHRIST. We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to His Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures (Jn. 1:1, 14; 6:38; 1 Tim. 2:5). The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary (Is. 7:14; Matt. 1:20-23). He perfectly obeyed His heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven (Matt. 3:17; 17:5; 27:24-26; 28:5-6; Acts 1:9-11; 2:22-24; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 4:15). As the mediatorial King, He is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God’s sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate (Matt. 28:18; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 1:3; 4:14-15; 7:25-26; 1 Pet. 3:22; 1 Jn. 2:1). We believe that by His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute (Rom. 4:24; 6:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 2:20; 3:13; Eph. 2:4-6; 3:18). He did this so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross He canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe (Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Col. 2:14). By His resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by His Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all His people; by His ascension He has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with Him (John 14:3-4; Rom. 1:4; Phil. 2:9-11; Col. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:10; Heb. 2:14). We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved (John 3:36; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Rom. 10:14, 17; 1 Tim. 2:5). Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before Him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:27-31).

5.9. THE JUSTIFICATION OF SINNERS. We believe that Christ, by His obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By His sacrifice, He bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God’s justice on our behalf. By His perfect obedience He

satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and His obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners (Rom. 3:24-26; 4:5; 5:18-19; Col. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24). We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification (Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14; James 2:18).

5.10. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to His people by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:27; Rom. 3:21-22; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5). Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ and, as the other Paraclete (Comforter), is present with and in believers (Jn. 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; Rom. 8:10; 1 Jn. 4:4). The Spirit convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by His powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in Him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone (Jn. 16:8; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:1-5; Titus 3:5). By the Holy Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive His sovereignly distributed gifts (Rom. 8:15; 1 Cor. 6:11; 12:4-11; 2 Pet. 1:4). The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service (Jn. 6:63; 16:13; Rom. 8:9-11; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 1:13-14; 3:16).

5.11. THE KINGDOM OF GOD. We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed (Jn. 3:5; Rom. 8:18; 14:17; Heb. 8:8-12; 1 Pet. 1:2). Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace (Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 2:11-14; James 2:18). Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good in our communities, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God (Prov. 11:10-11; Matt. 5:13, 16; Jn. 17:15; Phil. 2:15; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Rev. 21:24). Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God (Matt. 22:39; Gal. 6:10; Phil. 3:20). The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God (Matt. 6:10, 33; Mark 3:27; Acts 28:23, 31; Eph. 2:19; Col. 1:13).

5.12. GOD'S NEW PEOPLE. We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:6; Heb. 12:22-24). This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is in fact the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth (Eph. 1:22; 1 Tim. 3:15). The church is the body of Christ, the apple of His eye, graven on His hands, and He has pledged himself to her forever (Ps. 17:8; 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 1:23; 5:23, 30). The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world (1 Cor. 1:18; Matt. 28:19-20; Lk. 10:27-37; Jn. 13:35; 1 Cor. 11:23-34; 1 Jn. 4:20-21). Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked (Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Jn. 3:14-16). Christ Jesus is our peace: He has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which He put to death their hostility (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:13-16). The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus.

The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world (Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:15; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22; Rev. 21:1-5).

5.13. BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER. We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself (Matt. 26:26-28; Matt. 28:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25). Baptism is connected with entrance into the new covenant community; the Lord's Supper is connected with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of His return and of the consummation of all things. Baptism, an ordinance of the new covenant instituted by Jesus Christ, is to be for the person baptized a sign of his fellowship with Him, in His death, burial, and resurrection; of his being ingrafted into Him; of remission of sins; and of his giving up himself to God through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27; Col. 2:12). The Lord's supper is an ordinance of the new covenant, in which, by giving and receiving bread and fruit of the vine, according to Christ's appointment, His death is shown forth; and the worthy recipients, not in a literal or physical manner, but by faith, partake of Christ's body and blood, with all His benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace (Jn. 6:63; 1 Cor. 10:16; 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

5.14. THE RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS. We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with His holy angels, when He will exercise His role as final Judge, and His kingdom will be consummated (Matt. 13:41-43; 25:31-46; Acts 1:9-11). We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of Him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness (Jn. 5:27-29; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; 3 Pet. 3:10-13). On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished (Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22; Rev. 22:3). God will be all in all and His people will be enthralled by the immediacy of His ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of His glorious grace (1 Cor. 15:26-28; Eph. 1:6; Rev. 7:9-12, 15; 21:1-8, 22-23).

5.15. MARRIAGE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY. We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ (Acts 3:19-21; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity (Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31). Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are not in accord with Scripture, nor the doctrines of Cornerstone Bible Church, and are to be repudiated. Furthermore, we believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as a male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person. We believe the term "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union as defined in Scripture (Genesis 2:18-25). We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other (1 Corinthians 6:18; 7:2-5; Hebrews 13:4). We believe that God condemns all sexual activity outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest, and use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God (Matthew 15:18-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10). Because God has ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man and a woman, under God, Cornerstone Bible Church will only recognize marriages between a biological man and a biological woman. Further, the Elders, Deacons and staff of Cornerstone Bible Church shall only participate in weddings and solemnize marriages between one man and one woman. The facilities and property of Cornerstone Bible Church shall only host weddings or wedding receptions celebrating the marriage of one man and one woman. We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Cornerstone Bible Church as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to its members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by Cornerstone Bible Church in any capacity, as well as ministry leaders and those who serve as volunteers agree to and abide by this Statement on Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:22).

ARTICLE 6: MEMBERSHIP

6.1 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

6.1.1 Conversion. To be eligible for membership, a person must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the elders discernable evidence of conversion (Matt. 16:24; John 3:3-5; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8-10). Furthermore, the person must not be under the biblically warranted corrective discipline of a genuine Christian 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).

6.1.2 Baptism. The official position and practice of this church regarding baptism is known as the baptism of disciples alone or believers' baptism and is articulated in the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, Chapter 29. However, we recognize that there may be genuine disciples of Christ who desire membership in this church but who conscientiously hold to the Reformed view of paedobaptism (infant baptism) as articulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Belgic Confession, and Heidelberg Catechism. Such disciples may be admitted into the membership of this church under the following conditions: (1) With the exception of baptism, they are in substantial agreement with the church's doctrine and practice in other areas; (2) They are willing to listen to the elders explain the church's understanding of baptism; (3) They affirm that they are personally in obedience to the New Testament command to be baptized; (4) They agree to avoid creating factions in the church based on their view of baptism; (5) They agree to avoid trying to change the official position of the church regarding baptism. If these conditions are met to the satisfaction of the elders, then paedobaptistic disciples will be received into the membership of the church and enjoy all the privileges and responsibilities of membership.

6.1.3 Teachability. The Bible requires that members of local churches be like-minded; that is, that they be in substantial agreement on the major doctrines and practices of the Christian faith (Amos 3:3; 1 Cor 1:10; Phil 2:2, 3:16). Therefore, applicants for membership must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the elders a willingness to be taught the doctrines of the Bible as they are understood by this church (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:42; Acts 20:20-21, 27). We agree to give one another the benefit of the doubt concerning secondary matters of belief and practice not addressed in our core values, statement of faith, or constitution; we also agree not to become issue-oriented concerning these secondary matters (Rom. 14:1).

6.1.4 Age. The Bible does not teach a minimum age for baptism and church membership. However, in order for a person of any age to be eligible for baptism and membership in this local church, he must demonstrate to the satisfaction of the elders sufficient maturity to understand the meaning of the gospel, to follow the Lord Jesus Christ as a disciple, to understand the meaning of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and to be subject to the oversight and discipline of the church. A disciple meeting these requirements but under the legal age of adulthood (18) will be eligible for church membership but will not be allowed to vote or to be present at certain congregational meetings during which mature and sensitive subject matters are discussed, such as instances of sexual immorality.

6.2 RECEPTION INTO MEMBERSHIP

6.2.1 Request. A person who desires to become a member of the church shall make that request known to one of the elders. The elders will endeavor to get to know the person to determine whether that person has a credible profession of faith in Christ, is like-minded with the church, is capable of assuming the responsibilities of church membership, intends to give wholehearted support of its ministry, and is willing to submit to its government and discipline. Membership may be denied to those persons who, at the elder's discretion, are unqualified in any of these areas (Acts 9:26-27; 10:47; 11:2-18, 23).

6.2.2 Prior Memberships. If the applicant is or has been a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine the person's standing in that church and his reasons for leaving (Acts 15:1-2, 24-25; 1 John 2:19). If said church raises an objection which the elders consider valid, the applicant may be denied membership at the discretion of the elders.

6.2.3 Procedure. If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership, they shall notify the congregation of the person's application for membership. If no objection which the elders consider to be valid is raised, the person will be received into the membership by decision of the elders (Matt. 3:6-12; Rev. 2:2) and their reception will be publicly announced.

6.2.4 Membership Status. Adult members who are faithful in their commitments to the church body and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church as set forth in Article 6, shall be considered members in good standing and entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church (Acts 2:37-47). In recognition of the reality of age-appropriate responsibilities and privileges in the Christian life (1 Corinthians 7:9; 13:11; 1 Timothy 5:8), non-adult members will enjoy all the privileges and responsibilities of membership except voting, participation in congregational meetings where adult subject matters are discussed, or holding office. A member who relocates and therefore cannot be actively involved in the life of the body on a regular basis should seek to become a member in another local church. During a transition period, such an individual will continue to be considered a member of the body and remain under the oversight of the elders until his membership is transferred to another local church. In addition, if a member finds it necessary to endure a temporary but extended period of absence due to job assignment, military duty, school, or other similar circumstance, such an individual will continue to be considered a member of the body and remain under the oversight of the elders. In either case, whether due to an imminent relocation or temporary situation, a member who is in an extended absence status is expected to take the initiative in maintaining regular contact with the elders during the period of prolonged absence so that they can be faithful to his soul. Because of the providential lack of active participation in the life of the body, any member who is in an extended absence status will not be allowed to vote concerning church officers. This change in status will be determined by the elders and communicated to the individual member.

6.3 REMOVAL OF MEMBERSHIP

6.3.1. Removal By Physical Death. When a member of the church is promoted to heaven by means of death, the member's name will be removed from the church's membership role.

6.3.2 Removal By Transfer. When requested to do so, the elders may transfer a departing member in good standing to the fellowship of another church. A letter of transfer will be sent to the appropriate officer(s) of the church to which the member wishes to transfer. No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church or behaving in a disruptive or disorderly manner. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is in their judgment disloyal to "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3).

6.3.3 Removal By Resignation. Membership in this church is initiated jointly, by voluntary commitment from the individual applicant and acceptance by the church. Therefore, as a general rule, a member may voluntarily resign from membership in this church. However, there are circumstances in which unilateral resignation on the part of the individual member is not valid. For example, a resignation offered to undermine the procedures of corrective discipline is not valid, and the church may proceed with public censure, imposition of strictures, or excommunication in accordance with the procedures outlined in Article 6 (Acts 15:24; 1 John 2:18-19; 2 John 7-11).

6.3.4 Removal By Habitual Absence. The elders may remove any member from the membership of the church who is absent from the Lord's Day worship services for four consecutive weeks or six or more weeks over a 12 week period without a reason considered legitimate by the elders (Heb 10:25; Heb 13:17). The congregation and the person shall be informed of this action.

6.3.5 Removal By Excommunication. According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a church must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false, heretical doctrine, who blatantly or persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who

persists in disturbing the unity, peace or purity of the church (Matt. 18:15ff; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Section 6.2.4 of this constitution.

6.3.6 Implications of Removal. Cornerstone Bible Church does not exist in isolation from, but is part of the universal church of Christ, composed of all true churches. Accordingly, open and forthright communication among the churches is vital for the purity, peace, edification and unity of the church universal. Therefore, the elders may, at their discretion, disclose to the members of this church and to other churches the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Acts 15:24; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim, 2:17; 4:10; 1 John 2:18, 19). In addition, Cornerstone Bible Church does not exist in isolation from society at large. Accordingly, this church has a moral obligation to society both to act with integrity and to maintain its testimony (2 Cor. 8:20-21). Therefore, the elders may, at their discretion, disclose to other persons outside the ecclesiastical circles mentioned above the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Lev. 5:1; Prov. 29:24; 1 Pet. 4:15). Furthermore, termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, spread false teachings or reports, or engage in any other behavior which threatens the peace and unity of this church or the church universal. Accordingly, when it is established that a former member is behaving divisively, the elders may issue whatever warnings they deem appropriate to maintain and preserve the peace and harmony of this church and the church universal (Acts 15:24-31; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 4:10; 1 John 2:18-19).

6.4 PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP

6.4.1 Attendance at, appropriate participation in, and voting during church business meetings, except for non-adult members (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:12-14; 6:11-16; 1 Cor. 1:2; 5:4-7);

6.4.2 Laboring to extend God's Kingdom in ministries of the church as one's gifts, graces, maturity, and calling make appropriate (Rom. 12:3-21; Eph. 4:7; 11-12; 16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11);

6.4.3 Reception of the committed oversight and care of the elders of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3);

6.4.4 Reception of the committed care and discipline of the membership of the church (Acts 2:41; 5:13-14; 6:1-2; 9:26; 1 Cor. 1:2; 5: 4-5; Gal. 6:10).

6.5 MEMBERS' COMMITMENT TO THE BODY

6.5.1 Attendance at Church Meetings. Since this church holds to the sanctity of the Lord's Day and the special duty and privilege of corporate worship, and since the church is a body which of necessity must have its members present in order to function, the members of this church shall seek to come together on the Lord's Day at the times appointed for worship, prayer, teaching and preaching from the Scriptures, and the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Providence may occasionally hinder some from participation; however, generally this would be the exception and not the rule (Acts 2:42, Acts 12:5, Hebrews 10:24-25, 1 Cor. 11:18, 20, 1 Cor. 12:12-27). In addition, the elders may occasionally call special meetings to conduct church business. Members should seek to participate in the life of the body by being present at these meetings (Matthew 18:17, Acts 14:27). Non-adult members will participate in special church meetings at the discretion of their parents and the elders.

6.5.2 Financial Support. This local church is dependent on the financial support of its members in order to function. Also, it is clearly taught in the Scriptures that Christians should financially support the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate giving through the local church (Prov. 3:9-10; Mal. 3:8-10; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8,9). Therefore, the members of this church agree to manifest their commitment to the body by committing their financial support to it with a willing mind and cheerful spirit. While the New Testament does not specify a numerical proportion for Christian giving, the tithe is the only numerical proportion mentioned in Scripture and is the practice recommended for the members of this church (Gen. 14:19-20 with Heb. 7:4; Exod. 36:2-7; 2 Cor. 8:1-5; 1 Tim. 6:17-19).

6.5.3 Promotion of Edification and Peace. Inasmuch as the church is represented in Scripture as a body having many members, each of the members having its own particular function and yet having a concern for the health and protection of the whole (1 Cor.12:12-27; Eph. 4:4, 11-16), this church expects that each of its members will strive for the good of the entire body. As members of this church we must actively seek to cultivate acquaintance with one another and maintain mutual transparency and honesty so that we may be better able to pray for one another; love, comfort and encourage one another; and help one another materially as necessity may require (Gal. 6:10; Eph. 4:25; 1 John 3:16-18). In addition, we must discreetly confess our faults one to another (James 5:16), faithfully admonish and encourage one another (1 Thess.5:14; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25), and refrain from all backbiting and gossip (Prov. 10:31-32; 26:20-22).

6.5.4 Support of and Submission to the Leadership. All who come into the membership of this church are expected to recognize and to submit to the overseers, or elders, of the church. Supporting God's servants necessitates praying for them and their labors (Eph. 6:18-19), cultivating personal acquaintances with them, loving and esteeming them highly for their work's sake (1 Thess. 5:12-13), standing by them and not forsaking them in their afflictions and in all good causes (2 Tim. 1:15-18), and defending rather than prejudicing or damaging their good name (Acts 23:5; 1 Tim. 5:19). Submitting to God's servants necessitates imitating their Christian graces, faith, and godly principles as they also imitate Christ (1 Cor. 11:1; Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3), receiving their teaching with all readiness of mind and teachableness of spirit, yet with ultimate allegiance to the Word of God (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 2:13), humbly heeding their scriptural rebukes and warnings as from those appointed to watch for the souls entrusted to them and committed to labor to present them complete and mature in Christ (Col. 1:28), seeking and carefully considering their counsel as being from those counted faithful by the Lord (1 Cor. 7:10, 25), and lovingly embracing and abiding by their decisions regarding corporate policy in God's house which is His church (1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 3:5; Heb. 13:17), without creating division even when personally differing from their judgment. This submission will include willingly scheduling an oversight meeting with an elder or the elders when requested.

6.5.5 A Godly Christian Life. All who come into the membership of this church are expected to walk worthily of the Lord (Eph.4:1ff). Therefore, every member is expected to practice and cultivate godliness in the following areas: regular personal and family devotions (Deut. 6:6-7; Ps. 1:2; Mt. 6:6-13); biblical family life (Eph. 5:25ff; Eph. 6:1-4; 1 Tim. 3:4-5; 1 Pet. 3:7); personal evangelism (1 Pet. 3:14-15); Christian liberty (Romans 14:1, 10); separation from the world (Gal. 5:13; 1 John 2:15-16); and Christian morality (Ex. 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

ARTICLE 7: CHURCH DISCIPLINE

7.1 FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE. Every disciple of Christ is disciplined by Him personally and without intervening mediators (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:29-32; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 2:22-23) as well as mediately, through the church (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Mutual submission to one another and to the overseers whom the Lord has set over His church (1 Pet. 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when informal discipline alone is insufficient and formal corrective discipline becomes necessary.

7.2 CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE

7.2.1 General Statement. Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly, immoral, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. As a general rule and whenever feasible, an effort must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more serious steps are taken (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles given in Matt. 18:15-20, Rom. 16:17-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim. 5:19-22, 6:3-5, and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and applied to each case of corrective discipline as appropriate. In some cases, public admonition and/or public repentance may be warranted (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20). In other cases, some of the privileges of membership may need to be suspended and appropriate stricture imposed (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). In the most extreme cases excommunication from the membership of the church may be necessary (Matt. 18:17;

Rom. 16:17; 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 as appropriate the decision of the church in acts of corrective discipline.

Since the church is a spiritual and religious institution, the punishments (2 Cor. 2:6) implemented by the church in corrective discipline are also spiritual. They include public verbal reproof (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20), social avoidance and withdrawal of distinctively Christian fellowship (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14) and removal from the membership of the church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13). They are intended to bring about 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 (Rom. 12:17b; 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 4:15).

The goals of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6; 1 Tim. 5:20) and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender (1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 1:20).

Corrective discipline in the case of sinning non-adult members will be enacted in consultation with their parents.

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

7.2.3 Suspension of Privileges. Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness and testimony of the church that the Lord requires public reproof to be accompanied with the suspension of some of the privileges of membership according to the nature and gravity of the offense (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). In all cases of suspension the offending person is still regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church. Severe reproof is to be expressed (Matt. 18:17) and the suspension is to be enforced (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:6-15) by the entire church, and not merely by the elders representing the church. Therefore, when appropriate, the elders shall, at a duly convened business meeting of the church, recommend that the offending member be suspended. The elders shall specify the grounds of the discipline, the privileges to be revoked, and the stricture to be imposed. To be valid, an act of suspension must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, the elders shall have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension upon a member during the brief interval between their determination to recommend suspension and the congregational vote. A member under suspension shall be treated by the congregation according to the specific applications of the general principle of social avoidance (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15) determined by the elders. Those who humbly submit to the imposed discipline shall afterwards be forgiven, have their privileges restored, and be publicly received back into the full fellowship of the church (Matt. 18:15; 2 Cor. 2:5-11).

The general categories of sin which require suspension are as follows:

7.2.3.1 A Stubborn Private Offender (Matt. 18:15-17). When a private offense remains unresolved even after the method prescribed by our Lord in Matt. 18:15-16 has been graciously and prayerfully followed, it is considered an aggravated offense. The brethren involved shall bring the matter to the elders who, if they judge the matter to be serious and cannot persuade the brother to repent, shall report the situation to the church, and recommend that the stubborn brother be suspended (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17). If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains adamant in his sin, excommunication may be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Section 6.2.4. (Matt. 18:17b).

7.2.3.2 Divisive Teachings or Behavior (Rom. 16:17-20; Titus 3:10). When a member deliberately persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to the Scripture or our statement of faith, or attempts to sow

discord among the membership contrary to the Scripture or this constitution, he may be suspended as a factious man. Since every member is responsible to help preserve the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1ff), no one is to conceal such divisive behavior, but rather to reprove it, and disclose it to the elders (Deut. 13:6f; 1 Cor. 1:10,11). Whenever the elders become aware of such divisive behavior, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (1 Cor. 1:10ff; Titus 3:10). If, even after receiving repeated admonition from the elders, a member persists in such behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the divisive brother be suspended. If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication may be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Section 6.2.4.

7.2.3.3 Disorderly Behavior (2 Thess. 3:6-16; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14). Some kinds of conduct and doctrine are categorized as disorderly. If a member deliberately persists in conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for the order appointed by God for all mankind in the creation ordinances, namely: work, Sabbath, and marriage (Gen. 2:1-3, 15, 18-24; Exod. 20:8-11; Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:1-17, 39; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 2:5), he may be suspended as a disorderly man (2 Thess. 3:6). Similarly, a member may be suspended as a disorderly man if he deliberately persists in conduct contrary to the order established by Christ for His church in Scripture (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 14:37-40; 1 Tim. 3:14, 15) as recognized by our church in this constitution. Whenever the elders become aware that, in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline (1 Thess. 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (2 Thess. 3:14-15). Disorderly conduct is to be distinguished from scandalous sin. A disorderly member is not immediately to be excommunicated. Rather he is to be suspended in accordance with the directions of 2 Thess. 3:6-15 and not regarded as an enemy but admonished as a brother. However, if even after receiving such admonition from the elders, a member persists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the disorderly brother be suspended (2 Thess. 3:14-15). If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication may be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Section 6.2.4.

7.2.3.4 Scandalous Sin. If a member has sinned scandalously but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the elders, excommunication would be unwarranted. However, it may still be prudent to suspend him for a time so that he may realize the gravity of the offense and clearly manifest repentance (Matt. 3:8), so that reproach not be brought upon the Name of Christ and the church (Isa. 52:5; Ezek. 36:20-21; Rom. 2:24), and so that others may not be emboldened to sin (1 Tim. 5:20). If fruits worthy of repentance are not forthcoming, the elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Section 6.2.4.

7.2.3.5 Contempt of Church Discipline. If a person is accused or suspected of an offense requiring corrective discipline, yet absents himself from the meetings of the church, or refuses to meet with the elders so that the matter may be investigated, such a person may be suspended (Matt. 18:17; Num. 16:1-12, 23-27). The elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Section 6.2.4.

7.2.4. Excommunication

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

7.2.4.2 Church Consent in. All acts of excommunication must be executed by the gathered church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4). To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting at a duly convened business meeting of the church.

7.2.4.3 Following Suspension. Members who have been suspended may be excommunicated if they continue to be impenitent.

7.2.5 Restoration. The purposes of church discipline are to restore a fallen brother or sister and to keep the church pure. Therefore, it is the duty 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; Matt. 18:18-20). This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting.

ARTICLE 8: OFFICERS

8.1 GENERAL STATEMENT. Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Col. 1:18). He has ordained that individual churches should 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. Christ has ordained that local churches are to be administered by elders and deacons. Beside these two offices, the Scriptures acknowledge no office which continues in the church today (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

8.2 PREREQUISITES

8.2.1 Conformity. All church officers must be in substantial agreement with the church's core values, statement of faith, and constitution. Candidates for office shall inform the elders of areas of disagreement with the church beliefs. If an existing officer changes his views on any doctrine addressed in the statement of faith while in office, he shall inform the elders of his new position in an orderly manner.

8.2.2 Gender. Men and women are equally image-bearers of God (Gen. 1:26-27) and children of God (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11). We acknowledge and encourage the valuable gifts and contributions of women in the life and ministry of the church (Rom. 16:1-16; Eph. 4:16; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11). However, reflecting the diversity of roles within the Godhead, men and women have different roles in the home and in the church (1 Cor. 11:3). Therefore, in obedience to the teaching of Scripture, church officers (elders and deacons) shall be men (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-13).

8.3 ELDERS

8.3.1 Terminology. Those who have been called of God to rule and teach in the church are called elders, pastors, or overseers (sometimes translated "bishops"). These three titles are interchangeable and designate various functions of one and the same office in a New Testament church (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11, 12; Titus 1:5, 7).

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

8.3.3 Authority. The authority to oversee or rule this local church has been delegated by Jesus Christ in the Bible to the elders (1 Tim. 3:1; 5:17; 1 Peter 5:2; Hebrews 13:17). This God-given authority has both high prerogatives and important limitations:

8.3.3.1 It is Local Authority. The authority of the elders is limited to the sphere of the local church. Thus, they will not require punishments for sin beyond those of biblical church discipline, will not invade the biblically-defined spheres of other divinely-ordained human authorities (husbands, fathers, civil rulers, and employers), and will not command God's people regarding matters not specified in Scripture except to order the house of God by the application of His Word (Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14; Acts 20:28; Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Cor. 7:25-28, 35-40; Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Pet. 5:2-3).

8.3.3.2 It is Accountable Authority. 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 the 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. 18:15-17; Matt. 23:8-9; Gal. 2:11; 3 John 1, 9-10).

8.3.3.3 It is Shared Authority. The official authority of every elder 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 not undermine real parity among the elders (Acts 20:17, 28; Gal. 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17). Furthermore, the elders shall seek the concurrence of the members of the church regarding the sale or purchase of a church building or real estate or other such significant matters that the elders deem appropriate (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 13; 2 Cor. 2:6).

8.3.4 Pastoral Counseling. One aspect of the elders' duties is personally shepherding the flock of God (Acts 20:20, 28; 1 Thess. 5:12), which includes privately meeting with the members of the church for pastoral counseling and discipleship when required by circumstances or requested by members.

8.3.5 Plurality. The New Testament norm is for the office of elder in each local church to be shared by more than one qualified and called man at any given time (Phil 1:1; Acts 20:17). However, this church shall not ordain unqualified men as elders merely to maintain a plurality of elders (1 Tim 5:22). The specific number of elders this local church will have at any given time will be determined by the need as assessed by the existing elders, the number of qualified men in the congregation, and the collective assessment of the church members expressed through the advisory ballot and voting process.

8.3.6 Term of Office. The New Testament does not dictate the length of an elder's term of office. One truly called to this office is usually called to it for life. He is a gift of Christ to the church, and the gifts of God are without repentance. Only when an elder fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from being an elder. An elder may honorably resign from his office for a time if he is providentially hindered from properly discharging his pastoral duties. He may, at the discretion of the elders, without re-examination by the congregation, re-assume office when those hindrances have been removed.

8.3.7 Absence of Elders. Should the office of elder be vacant, the deacons shall call a church meeting over which one of their members shall preside. At this meeting the church, by vote, shall place herself under the temporary guidance of the elders of a like-minded, confessional church. This guidance shall remain in effect until removed by congregational vote.

8.4 DEACONS

8.4.1 Purpose. The office of deacon was ordained by the Apostles to enable the ministers of the Word to concentrate on the specific functions of their office; namely, preaching, teaching, counseling, and prayer (Acts 6:1-6; 20:20, 31; Eph. 4:11-13). Deacons are primarily responsible to administer the benevolent and business affairs of the church.

8.4.2 Qualifications. The qualifications for the office of deacon are almost identical with those for the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5). The only contrast between the qualifying standards for both offices is that the elders must be "able to teach" (1 Tim. 3:2) and equipped to shepherd God's people (Acts 20:28).

8.4.3 Relationship to the Elders. Scripture indicates that elders have authority over diaconal concerns (Acts 6:2-4; 11:30). The deacons, therefore, must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders.

8.4.4 Number. The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed from among the men who evidence the scriptural qualifications for the office and who are willing to serve (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

8.5 APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS

8.5.1 General Statement. The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. He has ordained, however, that each local church exercise the responsibility of recognizing those whom He is raising up to be elders and deacons in that particular church. Elders and deacons are ordained, or appointed, to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (Acts 6:6; 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 existing 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 gifts and graces required by Scripture for the particular office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office (Rom. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13). The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never be pursued without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest study of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered. Each member of the church has a spiritual responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

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

8.5.2.1 Nomination. Nominations to either office are made by the eldership. At least once every year at the annual business meeting an advisory ballot shall be taken. On this ballot every voting member may write the name of any male member(s) and the office for which the member believes that man to be qualified. Those men named by at least twenty-five percent of the members will then be considered by the elders. If the elders agree that the nominees are suitable, they will be notified and asked whether they will accept the nomination. The advisory ballot is a tool to advise the elders, not a requirement to bind them.

8.5.2.2 Election. Any church meeting for the election of officers shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days previous to its being held. The nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. During the discussion the nominee under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the assembly. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded (as necessary), and the nominee's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the nominee. Concerning the vote, unanimity of heart and mind shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when such unanimity is not realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election. This vote shall take place by written ballot subsequent to a full and free discussion oriented to the relevant scriptural passages.

8.5.2.3 Ordination. Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer shall be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the eldership. This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the whole church (Acts 13:1-3). The laying on of the elders' hands signifies their approval of an officer-elect.

8.5.2.4 Chairmanship. The elders shall choose one from their number to serve as chairman of their meetings. The deacons shall do the same. Chairmanship does not imply an increased level of authority.

8.6 REVIEW OF OFFICERS

8.6.1 Regular Review. There shall be a review of each officer's qualifications for office four years after his initial appointment and every fourth year thereafter for as long as he occupies the office in this church. The review shall take place during the next annual church business meeting following the individual officer's four-year anniversary date. The procedure for review is outlined in Section 8.6.3.

8.6.2 Special Review. There may arise reasons that would require an officer to be reviewed before the regularly scheduled time. Such a review meeting may be called by a majority of the church officers. The members may also request such a meeting. This request can only be made after two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19) have met with the officer in an attempt to resolve the issues of concern. The request must be set forth in writing with the signatures of one-third of the voting members in good standing and presented to the church officers. The church

officers may elect to go forward with the requested review meeting or they may elect to call in an advisory council of at least three elders from like-minded churches. The advisory council will advise the church whether to go forward with the review meeting or to dismiss the issue. The review meeting would also follow the procedure of Section 8.6.3.

8.6.3 Procedure for Review. Any meeting for the review of an officer shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. There shall be discussion and a vote by written ballot regarding the officer under review. During the discussion the officer under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the assembly. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the officer's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the officer. Any member who publicly suggests in such a meeting that the officer being reviewed is unqualified for his office must have previously spoken with the officer himself and informed the elders of the church of his concerns (1 Tim. 5:19). He must also present biblical and factual warrant for his concerns at the review meeting. Just as it is wrong for a church to retain an officer who is not biblically qualified, so also it is rebellion against the Head of the church to reject an officer for any but biblical grounds. Additionally, any officer about whom such concerns are raised must be permitted, if he wishes, to return to the meeting and defend himself. Concerning the vote, unanimity of heart and mind shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when such unanimity is not realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for the confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing confirmation no longer holds office in the church.

8.6.4 Resignation. An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion. This resignation together with its reasons and the date upon which he wishes his resignation to be effective shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the church.

8.7 FULL SUPPORT OF ELDERS

8.7.1 General Considerations. Elders 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 Cor. 9:4-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). Though all elders are equal with respect to the authority of their office, not all elders possess qualifications warranting full 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 support (1 Cor. 9:1-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17). Thus, before it undertakes his full support, the church must recognize that an elder or nominee to the eldership possesses special ministerial gifts and that he is excelling in the employment of those gifts for the benefit of the church in ways appropriate to his opportunities. Special caution should be exercised in giving full support to an elder for the following reasons: (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 serve Christ and His kingdom; (2) a major portion of the church's financial stewardship is involved, for which its Head will hold it accountable; and (3) a fully supported elder has a greater influence upon the church, for good or ill. The provisions of this section apply to any proportion of financial support required by an increase of ministry that would hinder an elder's full-time employment in a secular vocation.

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

8.7.2.1 For a Nominee. 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 the business meeting for this purpose is announced. A distinct discussion and vote for both election to the office and full support in the office is not necessary.

8.7.2.2 For an Existing Elder. 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. Such a recommendation may be considered in conjunction with the review of the elder involved. A distinct discussion and vote for both confirmation in the office and full support in the office is not necessary.

8.7.2.3 Conduct of the Meeting. During any meeting where full support is being considered, special attention shall be given to the relevant teaching of Scripture (1 Cor. 9:1-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17). During the discussion the man under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the assembly. Such discussion must at all times reflect the fear of God, the claims of truth, and the gravity of the matter. Any vote upon full support requires no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast for approval.

8.7.2.4 Review of. The full support of elders as well as their continuation in office will be subject to review (see Section 8.6). Normally, a review of full support will take place in conjunction with the review of an elder's qualification for office, whether at regular intervals or at special review meetings. However, circumstances may arise in which an elder's full support may need to be reviewed as an issue separate from his continuation in office. In such cases, a review shall follow the applicable procedures outlined above. Continuance of full support shall require no fewer than three-fourths of the ballots cast.

ARTICLE 9: LEGAL OFFICERS

9.1 PURPOSE. In order to comply with California State law governing non-profit organizations, this church shall have such officers as the law requires to represent the church before the state.

9.2 QUALIFICATIONS. Legal officers shall be regular members in good standing (Section 5.3).

9.3 AUTHORITY. Legal officers operate under the authority of the elders. Since their office is not biblically mandated, legal officers have no role in governing the affairs of this church.

9.4 APPOINTMENT. Appointment of legal officers shall be the responsibility of the elders. The duration of their term of office shall be for one year, but may be renewed indefinitely.

ARTICLE 10: CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

10.1 GENERAL STATEMENT. All congregational meetings shall be called by the elders. There shall be an annual business meeting of the church held near the end of January for the hearing of reports, the taking of the advisory ballot (Section 8.5.2.1), and the transaction of other business which the elders bring before the church. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

10.2 NOTICE OF MEETINGS. Notice of all congregational meetings in which business is to be transacted shall be announced at regular services for at least two (2) successive Sundays. Other business meetings at which there is no business transacted by vote may be called at the discretion of the elders without such notice.

10.3 QUORUM. Fifty percent of the voting membership shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

10.4 CHAIRMANSHIP. The elders shall appoint one from their number to preside at all business meetings.

10.5 VOTING. All adult members, except those suspended by the church or those in an extended absence status as well as minors, shall constitute the voting membership of the church. All voting members should regard their presence at a duly called church meeting with the same seriousness with which they would regard their attendance at a worship service. The elders shall determine whether absentee votes will be permitted on a case-by-case basis as members make known their reasons for absence. Unanimity of heart and mind shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when such unanimity is not realized, no less than a two-thirds majority of those voting will make a resolution valid. In other matters wherein the constitution requires a different proportionate vote, this two-thirds requirement will be overridden by the express statements of the constitution regarding those categories of business.

ARTICLE 11: CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

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

11.2 LIMITATIONS. Only when we must obey God rather than the provisions of this constitution may its requirements be disregarded (Acts 5:29). If at any time a member of this church becomes aware that adherence to this constitution would violate biblical principle, he should make it known to the elders. If the elders conclude that biblical principle requires disregarding a provision of this constitution, they are obligated to communicate this together with the reason(s) for their conclusion to the church within one month at a duly called meeting of the church. Furthermore, relevant amendments to this constitution must be submitted to the church and acted upon in accordance with the provisions of Section 11.3 within one year following this informational meeting.

11.3 AMENDMENTS. Amendments to this constitution may be adopted by a three-fourths majority of members present and voting at a duly convened church business meeting. Proposed amendments shall be distributed to the congregation in written form at least two weeks prior to such a meeting.

ARTICLE 12: DISESTABLISHMENT

This church can be disestablished by a three-fourths majority of members present and voting at a duly convened church business meeting. In the event of disestablishment, all church property, assets, and possessions, including real estate, shall be transferred, disposed of, or liquidated as determined by the legal officers. After the members have voted to disestablish the church, the legal officers shall represent the church in executing the transfer of church property and dissolving the legal corporation.