# Original Intent of the Columbia Bible Church Constitution and Amendments

**By original members Charles Stewart and Lee Walter on Feb. 25, 2010 and updated May 2, 2025 by Lee**

Each generation of Columbia Bible Church (CBC) membership has to make a choice of how to serve and glorify God. We believe the more informed the members are on the constitution and on their privileges and responsibilities before God, the better we will be able to preserve CBC's sacred trust, discern God's will, and act on it. No document is ever perfect, but the more we study the CBC Constitution, the more we respect it.

We believe that the Bible allows for doing church leadership (government) in different ways. As in God allowing Israel to have kings, even though He knew that it wouldn't be best for them over the long run. Our goal is to have our form of church leadership to act as servants before the congregation and Lord. With a proper set of checks and balances in obeying the Lord. With the ultimate authority resting in the membership under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This commentary describes our understanding of each article of the Constitution and Bylaws. If future generations understand the "how" and "why" as well as the "what" of the various provisions, they will be better able to apply and preserve it. We also provide some recommendations and notes about how we believe the constitution should influence church operation. Since fewer people are exposed to parliamentary procedure in school, we also provide simple guidelines for conduct of meetings if needed. Our 2025 Constitutional Amendments update motion passed included any punctuation, spelling, and or grammatical corrections that may be needed.

## Over-all View

Our constitution is an orderly structure of rules and conditions under which this group of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ is organized to serve God as a local Church. Paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln, the function of Columbia Bible Church is of the members, by the members and for the members. The Pastor and Deacons serve the members and the members serve God. The constitution provides a strong system of checks and balances to ensure that no single person, group or faction can overrule the membership as a whole. They can be summarized as follows:

- The Pastor is acknowledged as the spiritual leader, but the Statement of Faith can be changed only by a 3/4 vote of the members at an Annual Business Meeting. The Pastor is a member of the Deacon Board, but has only one vote and he is not counted in the board's quorum.
- The Deacon Board has authority to conduct church business, but it does so at the pleasure of the membership, and Deacons serve terms of only three years unless nominated and re-elected. Major contracts, loans, large purchases, and which missionaries to support, among other items, must be authorized by the membership before the deacons can act.
- Several provisions ensure that decisions made by the membership represent the will of the majority. The quorum for a business meeting is normally 50% of the members to prevent a few from making decisions against the majority. The more important issues require a 2/3 or even 3/4 majority vote for the same reason. Business meetings and their agenda must be posted well in advance to ensure all members are aware of them. Regular meetings of the Deacon Board are open to the congregation.

- The unity of the congregation is further protected by requiring members to accept the Statement of Faith and to have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ as savior. Yet the constitution makes it clear that the only privileges of membership are to vote at business meetings, submit petitions,

  and to serve in an elected office. Member or not, all are welcome to hear the Pastor's teaching, enjoy the fellowship of the congregation, and serve in a church ministry.

One outcome that our Constitution, or any constitution or rule, can never guarantee is that the decisions of the congregation always honor God and follow His will. It is the responsibility of every member individually and collectively to strive toward that goal.

## Name

Our name is Columbia Bible Church, a Corporation of the State of Washington. We are a corporation because it is a convenient legal entity for holding property and entering contracts. We do not represent the State of Washington and the state does not interfere with our function. Our membership is the corporation. The first section of the Constitution (i.e. excluding the Bylaws) is filed with the state as the Articles of Incorporation.

## Purpose

Purpose is another section that is not often considered, but is the whole reason for our ministry. If a proposed activity or function is not consistent with the purpose, it should not be done. We also recommend that the Purpose never be amended.

## Tenets

The Tenets state our fundamental beliefs. Our church will be independent; we will associate formally only with others who agree with our Statement of Faith, and we will not coerce membership or funds. We want our teaching, our fellowship and our members' giving to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not external groups or organizations. We would urge that the Tenets never be amended.

## Government

The government of this Church is said to be vested in the members, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Specific authority is granted to the Pastor and Deacons by the members as provided in the constitution or by direct approval of specific proposals at business meetings. This forces the membership to take active responsibility for conduct of our ministry and prevents the church from being ruled by the Pastor or a dictatorial deacon board.

## Membership

Membership in Columbia Bible Church is *not* a badge of spirituality or status. It is, rather, a pledge of *responsibility*. The only privileges of membership are voting at business meetings, submitting petitions, and holding office. Membership is not a requirement to participate in our fellowship, attend classes, to serve, or have a ministry.

Qualifications for membership are intended to protect the integrity of this church. Members must be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ who accept the core of our Statement of Faith and accept the authority of our Pastor. It is our intent that new believers can be members without knowing or accepting all the doctrines included in the full Statement of Faith, as long as he or she submits to the Pastor on the issues. The Deacon Board has the authority and responsibility to guard against an unlikely hostile take-over by a group actively promoting contrary doctrines by denying membership for any reason they deem appropriate before God.

*Special note: Each applicant for membership must specifically agree to the stated conditions and testify as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in person. Therefore, we do not automatically accept the children of members as members. Membership is an individual decision; it is not hereditary.*

*Special note: Columbia Bible Church welcomes unbelievers as well as believers who hold different doctrines to our fellowship. We desire all to hear the Word of God and to be influenced by the example or our congregation. Any person who does not create a disturbance or an unacceptable distraction is to be welcomed, no matter how distasteful their beliefs may be.*

Since the members have all authority and responsibility for the operation of this church, any member who ceases to exercise the privileges and responsibilities of membership, should be removed from membership. In fact, the Deacons are required to review and "prune" the membership roll at least annually to maintain its integrity. The congregation should be reminded of this from time to time from the pulpit.

*Special note: It is vital to remove from membership those who simply are not attending as they make it difficult to get a quorum for business meetings. If you have been dropped from the roll, please understand this need. Deacons must follow the Constitution in that attendance maintains membership, not whether one takes offense at being removed.*

The Deacons may also remove members from the roll who are unwilling to be governed by the constitution, do not accept the authority of the Pastor, reject the Statement of Faith or exhibit "conduct contrary to biblical principles".

To our knowledge the Deacons have never had to do this, praise God! In any case, a member who feels he or she was removed from the roll contrary to the constitution may appeal their case to the full membership at a business meeting. This requires signatures of at least 20% of the members on a petition to call a meeting for this purpose.

## Business Meetings

Business meetings are the means by which the members exercise their primary responsibility and authority. They are intended to be completely open and the agenda well-publicized.

To encourage efficiency and unity, the meetings must be conducted under some rules or protocol of order. We suggest a simplified protocol based on Roberts Rules of Order given at the end of this section as an efficient guideline. Using a guideline, rather than a strict set or rules, avoids getting bogged down in parliamentary procedure, and prevents someone well schooled in Roberts Rules from manipulating a meeting. We wanted the Spirit of God to guide us in orderliness and respect.

A member of the Deacon Board (usually the President but could also be the Pastor) presides as Chairman over business meetings. To conduct business, enough members must be present to represent the full membership. This is called a quorum which is set at 50% of the Members. We intend that a quorum be established only once, before business is conducted, though not necessarily at the beginning of the meeting. A few members may leave or others arrive after a quorum is established without a recount. However, if there is doubt, any member may raise a point of order to re-establish a quorum. There have been rare instances where a quorum was not met on the first count and one case where a meeting had to be rescheduled for lack of quorum. To provide some flexibility the quorum may be lowered to 40% of the Members by a 3/4 vote, or 30% by a 90% vote, of Members present. We believe this is a fair balance as the church grows between the need for active participation by the membership and the need to conduct business expeditiously.

If the rules break down so badly, or are manipulated so overtly that the conduct of the meeting is disputed, we want the members to just stop and start over as if the meeting never occurred. A disputed meeting may be adjourned on a motion passed by a 2/3 vote that also nullifies all the motions approved in the meeting. Hopefully, the meeting can be re-scheduled after the contention that disrupted the original meeting is resolved.

> *Special note: Adjournment by this provision should not be done lightly! Any future business meeting held within the next three months is required to be conducted strictly by the full Roberts Rules of Order, Revised, "unless otherwise provided" in all points prescribed by this constitution. Which means that ultimately the membership can decide how the meeting will be conducted.*

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Motions are limited to those items on the published meeting agenda to prevent any group hijacking a business meeting.
This does not require motions to be verbatim statements posted in the agenda, but they must at least be germane to the stated items of business. For example, an agenda item to authorize construction of a new storage shed would authorize motions on its location, financing, building method, paint color, etc., but <u>not</u> a motion to build a new auditorium. Votes on such "off-agenda" motions may be taken, but are only advisory.

> *Special note: When it comes to phrasing motions, following a procedure, or interpreting the constitution, every group has a "lawyer", and everyone has a tendency to become one. Such lawyers are overly concerned with semantics and like to argue about what other people might possibly think a word means. Such arguments are a disruptive waste of time that could be better spent in discerning God's will.*

The method of voting is up to the Chairman of the meeting and, in the case of a voice vote, or show of hands, his decision is final. However, we intend for the most important decisions, including election or removal of Deacons, call or dismissal of a pastor, or purchase of property, for example, be voted by secret ballot.
A member may also move for a secret ballot on any vote. We do not allow absentee or proxy voting to ensure that each member has the same authority and responsibility for conduct of business. Only those who have heard all the discussion are fully informed to vote.

> *Special note: Those teaching Sunday School and conducting the nursery are considered "present" in the building and may cast secret ballots for deacon election, missionary support, etc.*

## Statement of Faith

The Statement of Faith is the primary unifying force in the constitution. All members are required to understand and agree with the following principles without reservation. Missionaries only have to agree with items A through F:

A. Plenary and verbal inspiration of the scriptures
B. Salvation by faith alone
C. Substitutionary death of Jesus Christ
D. The triune godhead
E. Deity of Jesus Christ
F. Resurrection of Jesus Christ
G. Spirituality
H. Responsibility of the believers
I. Satan
J. Eternal state

Members do not have to understand or accept the following, though Deacons, the Pastor and Assistant Pastor(s) must:

K. Rapture and resurrection
L. The Holy Spirit
M. Eternal security
N. Great tribulation
O. Man created and fallen
P. The church - universal and local
Q. Spiritual gifts
R. Dispensational viewpoint
S. Death of Christ
T. Marriage, Sexuality, and the Family
U. Evolution vs. Creationism

This division between what members and leaders have to accept originated from a feeling that new believers should be eligible for membership before they fully understood all the basic doctrines. The full text of each Bible verse listed in the Statement of Faith is listed in a separate section of the Constitution booklet.

## Amendments

Amendments to this Constitution are intended to be rare and very carefully considered. In line with this we recommend that the motion to accept future amendments require a supermajority of 90% as all have been done in the past.

The constitution can only be amended at an annual business meeting and proposed amendments cannot themselves be amended. Thus, anyone proposing an amendment to the Constitution must educate and seek the approval of the membership well in advance of the meeting. Amendments may be proposed by any member. But before being voted on they must be approved by the Deacon Board or requested by a petition signed by at least 50% of the Members. Consistent with the seriousness of amending the Constitution, this petition requirement has the same rigor as calling a meeting to dismiss the Pastor.

## Dissolution

Dissolution is intended to be relatively simple and easy. This may seem odd, but if the church is in such dire trouble that dissolution is being considered, it is not useful for the constitution to make the process difficult or lengthy. The primary issue on dissolution is the method of disbursement of funds remaining after the disposition of church property which is to be described in the motion for dismissal. If this church continues its policy of avoiding debt, surplus funds should always be available for disbursement.

# Original Intent of the Bylaws

As the Preamble states, the Bylaws are rules for governing the *internal* affairs of an organization whereas the Articles of Incorporation concern our relationship with the outside, i.e. who we let in, what we stand for, etc. Our bylaws describe church officers, how they are nominated and elected, their duties, criteria for missionaries, and handling of church property. Unlike the Articles of Incorporation, the Bylaws are not filed with the State.

## Pastor

Though calling a pastor to serve requires a 2/3 majority vote, we recommend a supermajority of at least 90% for this very important decision where the unity of the church is being tested. The primary work of the Pastor is teaching the Word of God, administering the Lord's Supper, Baptism, and Marriage, and guiding the spiritual life of the church. He is the final authority on matters of Bible Doctrine, but does not dictate church business. This is reserved in the membership as delegated to the Deacon Board of which the Pastor is a member. This separation of powers is a unique feature of our Constitution and has served God's purposes well for over 40 years.

> *Special note: While the Pastor is a member of and has a vote on the Deacon Board, the quorum is preferably at least 2/3 of the deacons, and supermajority requirements for their votes are always stated as "2/3 of the deacons", for example. This is a subtle separation of power that allows the Pastor to influence simple majority votes, but not those issues reserved for decision by the deacons. We prefer that all decisions be made unanimously with the pastor's approval if possible.*

## Assistant Pastor

The qualification requirements and manner of calling the Pastor and Assistant Pastor are the same. We made them the same because their influence and testimony would likely be similar. However, the Pastor's authority and responsibility are specifically stated, while those of the Assistant Pastor(s) are to be defined by the Pastor. Hence the Assistant Pastor(s) serves under the direction of the Pastor. Unless the Deacon Board disapproves. The Pastor also has a vote on the Deacon Board and all committees while the Assistant Pastor(s) does not. We wanted the Pastor to be clearly in charge and the Assistant Pastor(s) to be clearly his assistant to avoid any potential for a power struggle.

More importantly, while the Pastor may only be dismissed by a large supermajority of the Members at a business meeting, the Assistant Pastor (s) may also be dismissed by request of the Pastor approved by the Deacons. There can only be one Pastor and the Assistant Pastor(s) must work diligently and enthusiastically under his authority. No conflict or competition can be allowed. If it does occur, the Pastor must have the authority, with Deacon approval, to dismiss the Assistant Pastor(s)without causing the trauma of a "trial" before the full membership.

## Deacons

The Deacons do the work of organizing and maintaining the ministry of Columbia Bible Church. Three to Seven Deacons serve rotating three-year terms to prevent a permanent group of ruling "elders". Unless the Holy Spirit directs us to re-elect a Deacon(s) to serve a consecutive term(s). We believe that some Deacons may also take on the role of an Elder/Overseer as described in the Bible.

Deacon candidates for the Annual Business Meeting are nominated by the sitting Deacon Board. It is the only business the constitution allows to be done in secret. But this much can be told. The Pastor usually reviews the Biblical qualifications (summarized in Acts 6:3 and 1 Tim 3:8-12) and the membership list is screened against them.

One additional Deacon candidate per position (who meets the requirements for office) may also be nominated directly by petition of one fourth of the members. This prevents a faction from keeping control of the Deacon Board. The Deacon Board must receive the nominating petition at least 10 days prior to the scheduled business meeting at which deacons are to be elected. Similarly, the two candidates nominated by the sitting Deacon Board must be published at least 30 days prior to this meeting so the members can decide in time whether to nominate a third candidate.

The deacon candidate(s) elected is the one who receives the most votes. If there is a tie vote, the tie is broken by a coin toss by the Chairman. We believe this is authorized by Proverbs 16:33, *The **lot** is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD. If the number of candidate(s) equals the number of open positions, then one will have the option to vote no on a candidate.*

*Article Three-Deacons-section B. number one a. intends for one vote only to take place for Deacon, whether for one, two, or three. By putting them in order of preference. So that if one is electing two or three Deacons then the one with the most votes will be elected, and then their name crossed off, and the one receiving the most votes then will be elected, and so on if three.*

## Board of Deacons

The Board of Deacons consists of the elected Deacons and the Pastor, though the Pastor need not be present for a quorum. Deacons' meetings are intended to be fully open (except for nominating deacon candidates) to the congregation. For this reason, they are to be held at the church, notice is posted well in advance, and minutes of the meeting are required to be posted within two weeks.

> *Special note: The Minutes of Deacons' meetings are the primary means of communicating Deacon Board decisions, actions, and deliberations. All members should read these minutes with interest! If they are not posted within the required two weeks, ask one of your Deacons to do so immediately!*

Though the Deacon Board may have the authority to make a decision, they should defer sensitive or important ones it to the membership. Deacons need to have the attitude of a servant! We also recommend that all Deacon Board decisions be unanimous as much as possible.
If one deacon is in firm opposition, earnest discussion and prayer is much more effective than a contentious vote! We recommend that the Deacon Board pray often during meetings, not just at opening and closing, but serious, around-the-table-twice prayer sessions asking God to influence the decision. We have seen powerful results from this as the Pastor can attest.

> *Special note: The congregation (not just members) have historically been most welcome to bring suggestion or comments to deacons' meetings, or just sit and enjoy the show. But this is not the place to bring criticisms of other members or their ministry. Satan never fails to grab these opportunities to jab us with his darts. Carrying an offense publicly to the deacons can cause terrible hurts, destroy ministries, and sully our testimony as a church, doing far more damage than the original offense. Talk it over with the Pastor or, better yet, do not take offense at all and let God handle it. For extremely serious personal grievances, see Matthew 18:15-17.*

The officers of the Deacon Board; President, Secretary and Treasurer, as well as the specific responsibilities to oversee the building, grounds and services, are agreed upon by group discussion at the first meeting after the new deacon is elected. There is no set progression. Usually the longest-serving deacon becomes President though some shy folks remain Treasurer or Secretary all three years of their term. Each of these offices is defined by a specific set of duties. There is no hierarchy - no one deacon has any more authority than any other.

## Missionaries

Missionaries have always been a sensitive issue. There are strong emotional bonds between missionaries and the congregation. This is why votes to support or withdraw support from a missionary require the highest (3/4) supermajority in the constitution. Once approved, the Constitution doesn't specify any term limits and support could continue indefinitely. However, we have established a 4-year support cycle for each missionary by specifying the number of years in the motion to support. Thus, the Deacons and members must periodically review and approve support of each missionary with the required 3/4 supermajority.

> *Special note: Our policy has been to support a few missionaries well, rather than giving a little to many. This requires considerable discipline. There are many very worthy causes deserving our attention, but we must not commit support to all who come to our door. We must also remember that prayer is more important than money.*

Whenever missionaries are voted upon, the Deacon Board must formally confirm that they accept the statement of faith sections A through F. The confirmation should be kept on file for members to review. Once support is approved by the members, the Deacon Board sets the amount. This gives the Deacons the flexibility to handle church financial problems, or to terminate support if a missionary should go so far astray biblically that immediate action is required. A vote by the membership on the amount of financial support is only advisory.

From time to time the church has the opportunity to support children from the congregation, and sometimes members themselves, on short-term missions. If these missions are more than three months, they are "missionary support" and must meet the same requirements as for the outside long-term missions.

> *Special note: The conditions and procedures described here do not apply to private contributions by members. Each person is completely free to support any mission any where in any fashion.*

# Simple Rules of Order for Conduct of Business

Even though the Chairman has the discretion how to run the business meeting. We recommend simplifying Robert's Rules of Order to the following more informal protocol as a useful alternative if deemed necessary. Church business is conducted at official meetings of the membership where proposals are approved, disapproved or amended by voting. The topics to be voted on must be stated in the meeting agenda that is posted before the meeting. This does not apply to motions and votes necessary to conduct the meeting. For example, a motion and voice vote are needed to approve the treasurer's report, adjourn the meeting, call for a vote, etc.

Members may ask questions, raise points of order, or make statements at any time during the meeting when recognized by the Chairman. Good order requires that only one person speaks at a time and others should listen attentively.

> *Special note: It's very important for orderliness that all high-priority or controversial issues be given lots of prior notice, explanation, and ample opportunity for member input well ahead of the meeting. It is simply not practical to educate the congregation at a business meeting. One way to do this would be to post or hand out proposed motions, reports, surveys, etc., weeks ahead of time. It also helps immensely to hold informal meetings early to hear all the arguments, gather ideas, get agreement and adjust proposed motions as necessary well before the actual vote.*

A. All decisions during the meeting, whether large or small, are made by 1) making a motion, 2) seconding the motion, 3) discussing the motion, and 4) adopting the motion by a vote of the members.
   1. Making a motion: A motion may be procedural or a question of business to be decided.
      a. Procedural motions: Often the chairman of the meeting will ask for a procedural motion to be made. For example, "The Chair will entertain a motion to adjourn", to which a member may respond "I so move". Members may make procedural motions without prompting from the chair. Some examples might include, "I move for a 15-minute recess", "I move to close discussion and vote", or "I call for a secret ballot".
      b. Motions of business: A proposed motion should be prepared before hand and read at the meeting by the Chairman with any other explanation he thinks necessary. Then the chairman will then ask for a motion, to which a member may respond with "I so move", restate the proposed motion, or state the motion in a different form but on the same item of business.
   2. Seconding a motion: At least two members must be in favor of a motion before it can be voted on - the person making the motion, and another who supplies the "second". A member seconds a motion by simply stating "I second the motion" or even "Second". Often the Chairman will ask for a second. A motion without a second drops from further consideration.
   3. Discussion: Members state the reasons for their support or opposition to the motion, ask questions, and generally develop and process information on which to make a decision. Discussion is closed by the chairman calling for the vote or by a person making a procedural motion to call for the vote. If a procedural motion to call for the vote is made, it must be seconded and voted upon (usually by voice vote) like any other before the main motion under discussion is voted upon. If the motion fails, discussion continues.
   4. Voting: Voting may be by voice ("aye" or "nay"), show of hands or secret ballot. The method of voting is determined by the Chairman, except that a member may make a procedural motion for a secret ballot on any vote.

a. Voice Vote: Those in favor of the motion all say "aye" at the command of the Chairman, and those opposed say "nay". The Chairman alone decides whether "aye" or "nay" prevails and his decision is final.
b. Show of Hands: Those in favor of the motion raise one hand at the command of the Chairman. The Chairman and/or those he may delegate counts the number of hands. Then those opposed are asked to raise one hand and are counted. The vote is determined by comparing the count.
c. Secret Ballot: The Chairman and/or those he may delegate gives each member a blank ballot on which to write "yes" or "no", the name of a Deacon, or other choice described by the Chairman. A member may make a procedural motion for a secret ballot on any vote. Secret ballots should be counted by a minimum of two or more members at the chairman's discretion.

B. Amending a Motion: If, after a main motion has been made and seconded, a member desires to change the main motion, he or she can propose an amendment. Amendments are brought up in the form of a motion, such as: "I move to amend the motion to read….", or "I move to amend the motion by adding (or deleting)". Once seconded, the amendment becomes the topic of discussion until voted on. The main motion, as amended or not, can be voted on only after the amendment passes or fails.

C. Restating a Motion: This is a desirable alternative to amending a motion where the change is relatively simple and the majority of the congregation appear to favor it (for example, if the main motion were stated in an awkward way, or has an error). During discussion, the member who made the original motion can simply be asked to restate his or her motion with the desired revision. If he or she agrees to restate the motion, and the new motion is seconded, no amendment is necessary.

1. Points of Order: A member may raise a point of order to the Chairman at any time by raising the hand and calling "Point of order". A point of order may be a failure to follow the stated agenda for the meeting (such as omitting the opening prayer), an error in procedure (such as opening discussion on a motion that has not been seconded), or a vote taken or motion made contrary to the constitution. A point of order is not a procedural motion. The Chairman must decide on the appropriate response and take action accordingly. If a member disagrees with the response of the Chairman, he or she may make a motion for a different action which is processed like any other motion.

   If the conduct of the meeting is in general dispute, a motion may be made to adjourn the meeting as follows: "I move to adjourn this meeting as disputed in accordance with Article VI, Section D, Paragraph 5 of the Articles of Incorporation". Note that this method of adjournment nullifies all prior votes at the meeting.