

Hope Reformed Baptist Church Constitution

Preamble

We, the members of Hope Reformed Baptist Church of New Lenox, Illinois, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

Hope Reformed Baptist Church is an elder-led congregation.

Article I - Name

The name of this church shall be Hope Reformed Baptist Church of New Lenox, Illinois.

Article II - Affiliation

A. Autonomy

We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23) and who directs the affairs of the local church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture (Ephesians 4:11-12). The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand under the authority of Holy Scripture. All major decisions will be made under the leadership of the elders with congregational approval. Major decisions by the congregation include, but are not limited to admission of new members, discipline of sinning members, budget, and major decisions regarding facilities.

B. Cooperation

The church may and does cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern. We may seek the assistance and counsel of other churches in matters of special concern to us (Acts 15:4, 6), but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church (II Corinthians 1:24).

Article III - Purpose

The main purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship (Ephesians 3:20-21), evangelizing sinners (Matthew 28:19-20), and edifying saints (Ephesians 4:25-32). Therefore, we are committed to the proclamation of God's perfect Law and the glorious Gospel of his grace through all the world and to the defense of the "faith once for all delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3).

Article IV - Articles of Faith

We adopt as the fullest expression of our faith the Second London Confession of Faith, commonly called the 1689 Confession. However, the ultimate authority in all matters of faith, order and morals is and must be the Bible alone, which truth is clearly set forth in the opening article of the Confession itself. This historic document is, however, an excellent summary of "the things most surely believed among us," and we find it to be an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness.

Article V - Membership

A. Necessity for Membership

We believe that local church membership is one of the good and necessary consequences deduced from Scripture, and for that reason we believe that all true members of the "church universal"

should also be members of a local church or seeking membership thereunto.

B. Requirements for Membership

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who manifests a life transformed by the power of Christ, who has been baptized, who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines and aims of this church, and who is willing to submit to its government shall be eligible for membership.

C. Procedure for the Reception of New Members

1. Application

A person who desires to become a member of the church may apply to the elders and request to be interviewed by them. During the interview the elders will seek to determine whether that person has a credible profession of faith, has been scripturally baptized, is in substantial agreement with the doctrines of the church and intends to give wholehearted support to its ministry and submit to its discipline.

2. Inquiry

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. At the discretion of the elders a letter of inquiry concerning the person's standing may be sent to that church before his acceptance as a member in this church is determined (Acts 9:26-27).

3. Reception

To be admitted into church membership, applicants shall be recommended by the elders for admission and must be accepted by a two-thirds vote of the the members present and voting at any regular or specially called members meeting,

and shall relinquish their membership in other churches when approved by the vote of the congregation.

D. Termination of Membership

1. By physical death

When a person of this church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall be automatically removed from the membership roll.

2. By recommendation

When it is so requested, the elders with the two-thirds vote of the congregation shall grant to a departing member in good standing, who desires to unite with another church, a letter of recommendation. No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church. The elders with the consent by two-thirds vote of the congregation may refuse to grant a letter of recommendation for any church which is in their judgment disloyal to the "faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints" or which does not exercise godly care over its members.

3. By exclusion

If a member habitually absents himself from the stated meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if due to relocation he ceases to maintain a vital contact with the church, he may be excluded from the membership at the recommendation of the elders to the congregation. A two-thirds vote of the members present and voting is necessary for exclusion. Also, any member who personally so requests may after due admonition be excluded from the membership upon the recommendation of the elders, and a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting.

4. By excommunication

According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and membership any person who teaches or insists on holding false and heretical doctrine (I Timothy 1:19-20), who blatantly and persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession (I Corinthians 5:1-13), or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church (Matthew 18:15-20).

The Procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Article VI.

E. Conduct of Members

1. Attendance

Every member is expected to be faithful in attendance at the stated meetings of the church unless providentially hindered. Regular participation in worship is necessary for entrance into membership and for continued membership in the church. (Hebrews 10:25)

2. Means of Grace

All public and private means of grace, such as the regular reading of the Bible, regular private and family prayer, and a proper reverence for and observance of the Lord's Day, shall be urged upon all our members. (Matthew 6:6; Romans 12:2; I Peter 2:2)

3. Giving

All the members are expected to conform to the scriptural duty of Christians to financially support the work of the Lord through the local church by systematic and proportionate giving, a tithe being the typical principle. (II Corinthians 9:6-15; Deuteronomy 14:22)

4. Evangelism

It is the duty of every Christian, as a member of a local

church, to labor for the extension of the kingdom of God both at home and to the ends of the earth. Therefore, every member of this church is expected prayerfully to recognize and to seize every opportunity to bear witness to his faith in Christ both by consistent Christian conduct and by the testimony of his words. (Matthew 28:19-20)

5. Personal Holiness

It is the duty of Christians to obey the teaching of Scripture with regard to moral conduct. Each member of the church is required to endeavor to render in his daily life loyal obedience to all the moral precepts established in the Word of God. (Romans 13:8-10)

6. Christian liberty

If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in his Word, a Christian is at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God and to glorify him in all things, a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren, a compassion for the lost and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul. (Romans 14:1-23)

7. Duty to the elders

All who come into the membership of this church are expected to recognize and submit to the authority of the elders in matters pertaining to the direction of the church. They are also to respectfully hear and follow the Scriptural teaching and admonition of the elders as they seek to lead according to the Word of God. (I Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:7, 17-18)

8. Duty to one another

Each member of the church is expected to strive and pray for the peace and purity of the church. Each member should

love, comfort, encourage and pray for one another. It is their duty to be kind, compassionate and forgiving to one another while consciously putting away all bitterness and anger. Each one should look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. This love should be manifested not only by words, but also by deeds. (Philippians 2:1-4)

Article VI - Church Discipline

The members of this church must be committed to the discipline of this body as it endeavors always to maintain the reality of the Kingship of Jesus Christ. Discipline is the exercise of authority given the Church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare. Formative discipline ought to always be sought as a means of sanctification. In cases when formative discipline is no longer sufficient, corrective discipline will be pursued. All actions of corrective discipline will be conducted with propriety and privacy; when action of the congregation is necessary, it will be taken only in the absence of non-members.

A. Formative Discipline

Formative discipline consists of the teaching of God's Word, the example of Christian living and the mutual ministry of the members of the body of Christ. Submission to one another and to the overseers whom the Lord has set over his church (Ephesians 5:21; I Peter 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body collectively.

B. Corrective Discipline

Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical or disorderly or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In all such cases reasonable efforts must be made to resolve the difficulty, correct the error, and remove the offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles given to us

in Matthew 18:15-16 and I Corinthians 5:1-13 must be fully followed in all cases of corrective discipline. When admonition is not heeded, suspension of some of the privileges of membership (such as participation in votes, or the Lord's Table, or other activities deemed necessary may need to be imposed, and if these measures fail, excommunication from the church may be necessary. All discipline shall be led by the elders and have the consent of two-thirds vote of members present and voting. This includes suspension and excommunication as detailed in 1. & 2. below.

1. Suspension

a. Any conduct on the part of a member that disturbs the peace of the church or prejudices its testimony may require that the offending brother or sister be debarred by action of the elders church from participating in certain activities of the church according to the gravity of the offense. A suspension shall remain in force until the suspended member gives evidence of true repentance and change of conduct. When a suspended member can be restored to the congregation by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting.

b. A person who is under suspension, shall be considered "not in accord with the tradition" now revealed in Scripture. As such, the members of the church must endeavor to "warn him as a brother" rather than regard him as an outsider. Nevertheless, scripture requires the church to withhold normal fellowship from one whose sin has required suspension. (II Thessalonians 3:6-15)

c. If a member has sinned publicly but shows hopeful sign of repentance, including submission to the admonition of the elders and/or the members of the congregation, it may still be necessary to suspend him for a time from some of the privileges of membership lest reproach be brought upon

the church, others be emboldened to sin, and the offender himself fail to test his soul and realize the gravity of his offense. Those who humbly submit to the imposed discipline shall afterwards be wholly forgiven and received back into the full fellowship of the church.

d. In the case of a person accused or suspected of gross sin who absents himself from the congregation, the elders with the two-thirds vote of members present and voting shall have the suspension continue in force as long as the conditions giving rise to it continue.

2. Excommunication

a. The Lord Jesus Christ has instituted excommunication as an authoritative act of the church, undertaken by the consent of its members, in response to unrepentant sin on the part of one of its members which has brought a sense of scandal and shame to the congregation, in which the offending member is entirely separated from the privileges of membership in the church, both for the purpose of purifying and vindicating the church and for the further purpose of calling the offending member to repentance, reformation, and salvation.

b. Some types of conduct must be categorized as "immoral" (I Corinthians 5:9-11; 6:9-10), and a member guilty of such conduct must be cut off from the fellowship of the church (I Corinthians 5:3-5, 13; Matthew 18:17). In such a case the elders (and the members of the church) shall make earnest efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation. If these efforts fail, the elders shall report the same to the congregation at a regular or specially called meeting of the members and recommend that the offender be excommunicated. According to Scripture (Matthew 18:17; I Corinthians 5:4) this action must be taken by the en-

tire church. Therefore, to be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting.

c. Likewise, some wrong opinions regarding the doctrines of Scripture are so serious that they must be categorized as "heretical" (Galatians 1:6-9; I Timothy 4:1). A member, who persists in propagating or holding any such opinion, in spite of earnest and patient admonition by the elders (or members of the church), shall be excommunicated in the same manner as an immoral person.

3. Restoration

It is the responsibility of the church to forgive and restore to full membership a disciplined person who has given satisfactory evidence of his repentance and reformation (II Corinthians 2:6-8). This shall be done, on the recommendation of the elders in a duly convened meeting of the church membership by at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. A suspended member may be restored by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting.

Article VII - Officers

Jesus Christ alone is Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18), and He governs His Church through officers whom he appoints and who are endowed by his Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. There are two offices in the church: that of elder and that of deacon (Phil. 1:1; I Timothy 3:1-13). It is the duty of the church to seek and discover among its male members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts and graces for office-bearing and, after formally recognizing them by a vote of the members, to set them apart by united prayer, and then to submit to their authority. Any man called to be an office-bearer in this church must conscientiously affirm his full subscription to the Articles of Faith (the Second London Confes-

sion of Faith). Should he at any time move from his position, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this fact known to the church. Recognizing that terms may be defined differently, what HRBC means by full subscription is confession of the doctrines expressed in each chapter of the LBCF, yet with liberty and charity over minor matters of wording, application, and nuance not essential to those doctrines as a whole to the LBCF.

A. Elders

1. Plurality

Whereas in new or small congregations only one man may have the gifts requisite to his being recognized as an elder (such a congregation may, in fact, invite a man who has the necessary gifts to come and labor among them), the Scriptures appear to indicate that normally there should be a plurality of elders in the local church (Acts 20:17). These are also called "bishops" (meaning "overseers") because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). They are "shepherds and teachers" given to the church "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-12 ESV).

2. Full-Time Elders

In view of the fact that the responsibilities of this office are numerous and grave, it is highly desirable that at least one elder should devote his full time to the work of the ministry and the oversight of the church. The church is responsible to give adequate financial support to such men (1 Corinthians 9:9-14; 1 Timothy 5:17-18), and it is free to invite men from outside the local congregation to come into its midst and serve in this capacity.

3. Responsibilities

Elders are responsible for the spiritual ministry of the

church, the implementation of discipline and the oversight of the souls of the church's members "as they that shall give account" to God (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3). While every elder should be "apt to teach", some will be more engaged in formal and public teaching, while others will be more engaged in private teaching, admonishing, and governing. Gifted men who are not recognized as elders may engage in public preaching and teaching, provided they are godly in character and behavior and exercise their gift under the oversight of the elders (I Peter 4:10-11).

4. Oversight

While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as the other members of the church (I Timothy 5:19-20).

5. Selection

The church should endeavor to discover and formally recognize all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite gifts and graces and to set them over the church, but only such men. Thus, when men have been ordained to this office the church will have the confidence that it has recognized the overseers whom the Holy Spirit has set over it (Acts 20:28). Therefore, the church can fix neither the number of elders nor the length of their term of office.

6. Qualifications

The qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of elder are clearly set forth in Scripture, particularly in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

B. Deacons

1. Responsibilities

Deacons are responsible to administer the ordinary business, secular affairs and benevolent concerns of the church so that the elders may devote themselves without distraction to more spiritual matters (Acts 6:3-4). They must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and subjection to the elders.

2. Selection

Neither the number of deacons nor the length of the term of their office shall be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having scriptural qualifications for that office (Acts 6:3).

3. Qualifications

The qualifications for a man chosen to fulfill the office of deacon are particularly set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

C. Appointment of Officers

The local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is responsible to appoint men to the office of elder and deacon. Each man appointed should have an inward conviction that the Lord is calling him to the particular office, and the church should recognize that calling as it observes in the individual gifts and graces which the Scriptures require for the particular office. This is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by prayerful waiting on God for guidance, careful perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture and a dispassionate evaluation of each man's qualifications. These activities are the responsibilities of each member of the church as well as the church as a whole (Acts 6:3).

1. Nominations

a. Nominations to the office of elder and deacon shall be made by the members of the church under the direction of the elders. Nominations shall be given to the elders. The elders shall seek initial help from current office bearers in examining these men. After examination the men shall be presented to the congregation for consideration and further examination. A vote will be taken on those men who have been nominated with a three-fourths majority required to be raised up to the office.

b. The elders may at any time of year seek help from the congregation to nominate a candidate or candidates to either or both offices and call a special congregational business meeting for their consideration. A man may not be nominated to either office without his knowledge and prior consent.

c. Members of the congregation will be given the time and opportunity to present to the elders any concerns they have about any nominee, particularly any reason they may know why the nominee should not be chosen for office. It is the responsibility of the members to bring such concerns to the elders so that they may be investigated and discussed in advance of a final vote.

2. Election

When the time comes to consider a nomination during a business meeting of the church, the candidate and any members of his immediate family who are present shall be asked to leave the room while his qualifications are presented to the congregation. Then a written ballot shall be taken. No less than a three fourths majority of the members present and voting shall be required for the election of an officer.

3. Installation

The newly elected officer shall be publicly installed in his office at a regular worship service by the prayer of the whole congregation and the laying on of the hands of the existing elders (Acts 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:22).

4. The calling of a full-time pastor

Whenever the position of a full-time pastor becomes vacant, the elders shall seek to form a pulpit committee from nominations given by the congregation. At least one elder, ordinarily but not necessarily, must serve on the pulpit committee. The pulpit committee will be responsible for seeking candidates for the pastorate and will recommend its choice to the congregation. Prospective candidates will be presented to the congregation one at a time for their prayerful and careful consideration. A candidate must obtain at least a three-fourths majority of those present and voting before the church extends him a call.

5. Removal of officers

a. Officers are subject to the same rules of discipline as other members of the church. They shall hold office as long as they are faithful to their calling and have the confidence of the congregation. An officer may honorably resign from his office if he feels he is providentially hindered from properly discharging his responsibilities or for other good and valid reasons.

b. In the case of a man no longer meeting the scriptural qualifications for his office, he may be brought for re-evaluation at any time by at least one of the elders or upon the individual written requests of one-third of the members in good standing. These requests must be presented to the elders, who will in turn call a special congregational meeting

of the members of the church, disclosing the nature and purpose of the meeting. The officer in question will have the opportunity to hear and answer any charges made against him. He may be removed from office by a majority vote of those members present and voting.

c. The full-time pastor may resign from his office by giving notice of not less than thirty days. Should it become necessary to dismiss a pastor, he shall be given at least sixty days notice of termination with salary, at the discretion of the elders. The elders shall determine whether or not he shall continue to discharge the duties of his office during that period.

6. Appointment of Chairmen

The elders shall choose one of their number to be their chairman and the deacons shall choose one of their number to be their chairman. These men shall be known as "chairman of the board of elders" and "chairman of the board of deacons" respectively.

D. Procedure in the event there are no Elders

1. If the church has no elders, the congregation shall nominate at least three but no more than five godly men who will act as an interim leadership committee. Ballots will be submitted and those men receiving the highest number of nominations will serve on this leadership committee. However, nominees must receive at least thirty percent of members present and voting.

2. The leadership committee will act only for a limited time until an elder or elders are raised up in the congregation.

3. The leadership committee, with the consent of congregation by a majority vote, shall seek the help and advice of elders from sister churches of like mind for counsel.

4. It is understood that the leadership committee are not elders or deacons in the church. They may function in an administrative capacity to attend to the everyday business of the church only. Activities that require spiritual oversight, such as, but not limited to the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, conducting baptisms or celebration of the Lord's Supper, enacting church discipline or admitting new members into the church must be conducted by ordained elders. The leadership committee is free and should contact qualified elders from other local churches to perform these activities until such time that the church may raise up qualified elders from among themselves.

5. If no elders are raised up within three months the congregation shall nominate new men to the leadership committee in accord with paragraph 1 in this section D.

Article VIII - Trustees

For legal purposes the board of trustees of the church shall consist of the elders and deacons, with the chairmanship chosen from among that group.

Article IX - Congregation Business Meetings

There shall be a quarterly members business meeting of the church for the hearing of reports, the election of officers, and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the meeting. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

A. Notice of Meetings

1. Regular Procedure

Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at regular worship services on two successive Lord's Days immediately prior to the meetings. However, in the case of an

emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each member of the time, place and purpose of the meeting.

2. Special Circumstances

Meetings for the hearing of special reports or for seeking the counsel of the congregation may be called on shorter notice, but no vote may be taken or other business transacted at such meetings.

B. Quorum

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

C. Chairmanship

The chairman of the board of elders shall preside at all business meetings. In the case of his absence or inability to serve, the elders shall appoint another, preferably of their number, to preside.

D. Voting

1. Qualification

All regular members who have reached the age of eighteen years and are in good standing in the church may vote on any question properly brought before the congregation.

2. Majorities

Unanimity of heart and mind under God shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realized, not less than a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting shall be required to make a resolution valid.

Article X - Dissolution

In the event of dissolution of this organization, assets shall be distributed to one or more non-profit organizations of like faith and practice chosen by the elders.

Article XI - Amendments

The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the members present and voting at a duly called congregational meeting. Amendments should originate with or meet the approval of the elders, or be presented in writing by one-third of members, and must be distributed to the members of the church in written form at least two weeks prior to the congregational meeting.

Article XI - Previous Constitutions

All previous Constitutions are hereby repealed and made null and void.

Article XII - Document History

Originally adopted March 3, 2012.

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