

WOBC Church Constitution May 11, 2014

Preface

There are many good reasons why a New Testament Church should have Articles of Faith, a Covenant, and a Constitution. Together they can greatly assist us in the efforts of biblically organizing and conducting the ministries which have been entrusted to us by our Head, Jesus Christ. It must be readily acknowledged, however, that these documents, despite their usefulness and precision, will avail nothing apart from the presence and power of the Spirit of God in a Church. It is with this keen awareness of our absolute dependence upon our great God, that these articles are set forth.

Preamble

We, the members of West Oaks Baptist Church do establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

Article I - Name

The name of this church shall be 'West Oaks Baptist Church'.

Article II - Purpose & Vision

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints. To this end we are committed to our vision of being a kingdom-minded, Christ-exalting, multigenerational community of faith.

Vision -

1. Kingdom-minded - We are committed to the extension of the kingdom of God through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ to all mankind. We commit to forwarding this proclamation to those as near as our neighbors and as far as the ends of the earth. As God should bless the going forth of his gospel through the conversion of sinners we commit to building his kingdom through the comprehensive discipleship of those same converts and the planting of new churches.
2. Christ-exalting - We gather as a church because we have been redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and we gather for the express purpose of exalting our Savior. He is the head of the church and the center of all we do as his chosen people. When we gather our worship is directed at him alone. We seek to conform to Scripture in all things and to exalt Christ in our singing, prayer, reading, and preaching. We also commit to showing him forth through the scriptural practice of baptism and the Lord's supper.
3. Multigenerational - The Church is not a gathering of people from a single age or interest group. One aspect of the gathered people of God is that they represent people from all ages and levels of Christian maturity. In our gathering together we seek to follow the commands and example of Scripture with the younger and more immature looking to the wisdom and example of those who are older and wiser. Likewise the older and more mature believers are not to sit comfortable in their own faith and life but are to seek by both instruction and example to disciple those who follow them in the commands of our Lord.

4. Community of faith - We seek to live as Christ has instructed us, not as individual Christians pursuing Christ all on our own, but as a gathered community and family of faith wherein we honor our Lord by loving one another. As such we seek to be involved with one another in our daily lives and to encourage one another toward ever-growing godliness and holiness.

Article III - Documents of the Church

The Church Constitution - This constitution is accepted by the present members as a document to describe those things by which we identify ourselves and to which we will submit ourselves in all future engagements as a local body of Christ. It is to be accepted voluntarily by all new members as they offer themselves for membership.

The Church Covenant - We hold the attached Church Covenant of West Oaks Baptist Church as that agreement by which we commit to fellowship with one another as a local body of the Church of Jesus Christ. With this covenant we enter into a voluntary fellowship with one another out of obedience to our Lord. This covenant is committed to by all current members at the time of this constitution and is to be entered into by all new members as they offer themselves for membership to this church.

The Church Confession - In the Reformed tradition, the ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice is and must be the Bible alone. However, we hold the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 (LBC1689) as an excellent summary of those things laid out in God's word. We accept this confession, not as an authoritative rule or code of faith, whereby we are to be fettered, but as an assistance to us in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. While we hold this confession as an excellent summary of those things taught in God's word we understand that among the members of this church there will be varying levels of understanding and growth in the doctrines described therein. As such, we do not seek to hold each and every individual member to the full breath and depth of the confession but rather to a substantial agreement with those things described therein, an understanding that the elders will be teaching in accordance with these doctrines, a willingness to be taught and search the scriptures, and a commitment to avoid divisiveness over beliefs discordant with those the confession espouses.

Article IV - Church Government

Jesus Christ is Lord and Head of his church. His will as expressed in the Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, is the sole authority in matters of faith and practice. As such we look to Scripture to determine the nature of the government of the church.

Christ has ordained that individual churches should be led by office bearers whom He calls and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Those who have been called of God to lead and teach in the church are called elders, pastors, or overseers. These are three interchangeable names designating one and the same office in New Testament church (Acts 20:17,28; Eph 4:11,12; Titus 1:5,7). The elders are responsible for the oversight and shepherding of the flock of God. In accordance with the scriptures, elders are to be men who are qualified biblically (1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9) and called to the office by both internal confirmation of the Spirit (1 Tim 3:1) and the external confirmation of the body of Christ (1 Tim 5:22). The biblical model portrayed in scripture is of leadership of individual local bodies

by a plurality of elders rather than a single pastor. This is the purposed model of West Oaks Baptist Church though we acknowledge that the provision of qualified and willing men is a gift of God's Holy Spirit and there may be times when God provides only a single man to fill the office.

We believe that according to the scriptures Jesus Christ has invested all authority in the local church and has not created any overarching authority in the form of an ecclesiastical body. As such West Oaks Baptist Church is an independent self-governing congregation. In accordance with our confession (LBC1689 26:14) we do acknowledge the appropriateness of cooperation between independent congregations in associations of like-minded churches. At the time of this writing, West Oaks Baptist Church is in formal association with SBC and CREATH. Such voluntary associations can be made or dissolved by recommendation of the elders at a duly called congregational meeting with an accompanying vote of affirmation of 2/3 of the members present.

Article V - Membership

1. Section 1 - Requirements for Membership

The membership of this church shall consist of only those who have given a credible profession of faith in Christ Jesus as Lord. Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized, and who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines, covenant, aims, and government of this church, shall be eligible for membership.

1. Profession of Faith - Any person who meets the above mentioned requirements shall apply for membership to the elders of this church. A time and place shall be set for a meeting or series of meetings with the applicant as determined by the elders. The applicant shall attend, receive instruction on the beliefs and teachings of the church, and be questioned as to his or her basic Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and seriousness of intention to support wholeheartedly the total ministry of this church.

2. Letter of Recommendation – If an applicant holds previous membership in another evangelical church, then, in addition to a profession of faith and meeting with the elders as mentioned above, he or she shall also present a letter of recommendation to the elders of the church as a part of his or her examination for membership. However, the requirement of an official letter of recommendation may be bypassed at the discretion of the elders.

2. Section 2 - Procedure of Receiving New Members

When the elders are satisfied that an applicant gives a credible profession of faith and meets the requirements for membership, they may accept that person as a member. The right hand of fellowship will be extended to new members by the church at a regular worship service.

3. Section 3 - Termination of Membership

1. By Transfer - A member may transfer to another evangelical church by requesting a letter of commendation provided they are in good standing and not subject to or under discipline at the time of the request. Membership will be terminated as soon as the member has pursued and entered into membership in the receiving church.

2. By Excommunication - It is right and in harmony with the Scriptures for the congregation, upon recommendation of the Elders, to exclude from this fellowship any person who persists in holding false or heretical doctrine; or who obviously and persistently lives inconsistently with his profession; or who lives in violation of the law or public morals; or who persists in disturbing the unity and peace of this church (Matt. 10:15ff; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; 2 Thess. 3:6,11,15; Romans 16:17).

3. By Dismissal - There may be times in which a person leaves this assembly without ever officially joining themselves to another like-minded body. While forsaking the assembly of the saints is contrary to the command of Christ and inconsistent with the testimony of a true believer there may be unusual circumstances which would make excommunication inappropriate. In such cases the elders, at their discretion, may dismiss such departed brothers or sisters from membership in this church.

4. By Death

Article VI - Conduct

1. Section 1 - Means of Grace

All public and private means of grace as are laid out in the Scriptures, such as keeping the Lord's Day, regular attendance at the services of the church, daily systematic reading of the Bible, and private and family prayers shall be urged upon our members.

2. Section 2 - Government of the Home

The church expects its members to follow the Scriptures in home government. God has required that godliness in the home have a high priority in every life. The home holds a central attention in God's Law and is the object of frequent exhortation in the New Testament. Men are expected to rule their homes with gentleness but firmness. They are to love their wives with a Christ-like love. Women must be subject to their husbands. Parents should train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) by holy example, catechizing, consistent education, and firm discipline (including the use of the rod of correction - Prov. 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15). Children must reverently obey their parents (Eph. 6:1). These primary responsibilities, prayerfully executed, will honor the name of Christ in the community and strengthen the cause of Christ in generations to come.

3. Section 3 - Missions and Witnessing

It is the duty of every Christian and of every Church of Christ to seek to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Missionary efforts are the natural consequence of regeneration (Psalm 51:10-14). 'Preach the Gospel' is a frequently repeated command of Christ. It is the duty of every child of God to witness by life and word. Personal efforts at witnessing for Christ are expected of every member. Beyond this, we are committed to common efforts for sending the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

4. Section 4 - Principles of Giving

It is clearly taught in Scripture that Christians are to support the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate offerings made through the local church. This is set forth in both positive command and favorable example (Malachi 3:8-11; 2 Corinthians chapters 8 & 9). Hence we pledge ourselves to systematic contribution for the support of this church with a proportion of our income according to the principle in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.

5. Section 5 - Christian Liberty

We shall require of each other in our daily walk and conversation loyal obedience to all those moral precepts established in the Word of God (Hebrews 10:24, 25). However, where God has not prohibited certain practices in His Word, the Christian has liberty to participate in them. The following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

1. Fear of God - As the servant of Christ, all actions must be motivated by love to God, and all objects must be used for His glory. The term 'liberty' is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which is sin. (1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:4-5; 1 Peter 2:15-16).
2. Love of Brethren - Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow saints must always deeply affect his decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which will edify them and prevent their stumbling (Gal. 5:13; 1 Cor. 10:23; 1 Cor. 8:9).
3. Compassion For The Unconverted - Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and that behavior chosen which is likely to win some (1 Cor. 9:19-22).
4. Watchfulness Over The Soul - Though free in conscience to use all of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded because of remaining lusts. Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain in order to persevere in the faith (1 Cor. 9:23-27).

6. Section 6 - Support of Church Leaders

It is the duty of every member to respect the God-appointed officers of the church. The duties of church members toward their Elders and Deacons, as well as other ministers and teachers, are as follows:

1. To pray for them, that God would open a door of utterance unto them, to unfold the mysteries of the Gospel (Eph. 6:18-20).
2. To obey them in the Lord, in whatsoever they instruct or admonish, insofar as that admonishment is in accordance with the word of God (Heb. 13:17-22).
3. To follow their example and footsteps, as far as warranted by the Word (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 3:17; Heb. 13:7).
4. To stand by them, in all their trials and afflictions, and defending them in all good causes (2 Tim 1:5).
5. To avoid publicly exposing the faults and weaknesses of these brethren, remembering that the prosperity of the Gospel depends much on their good report (Acts 23:5). This does not mean leaders are exempt from church discipline or that there may be times when specific sins do need to be made public.

Article VII - Church Discipline

All discipline in the church is intended for the good of the whole body as well as the individual members. Both the holiness of Christ's bride and the honor and glory of Christ himself are at stake. Though the term discipline has associations that are primarily negative in people's minds in the biblical understanding discipline is multifaceted and has both formative (building up) and corrective aspects. All Christian discipline is to be pursued out of a heart of love for our brothers and passion for our Savior Jesus Christ.

1. Section 1 - Formative Discipline/ Positive Instruction

Formative church discipline is the 'building up' aspect of Christian discipline that involves instruction and example. This is captured in the biblical concept of 'discipleship'. Formative discipline is accomplished through the teaching of God's Word, the example of Christian living, and the mutual ministry of the members of the body of Christ to each other. Its goal is the instruction of disciples, the transformation of their lives, and their edification in love (Eph. 4:11-13; Rom. 12:1-16; 1 Cor. 12:4-27). Formative discipline has a sanctifying influence. It utilizes the talents of each member, whether young or old, for the edification of all. Every member should be satisfied with his/her God-given ministry, and thus we shall all grow continually in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 4:7-12).

As members of this church we recognize our obligation to honor, serve, worship, praise and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ in all that we say and do (1 Cor. 10:31). Jesus Christ is the head of the church and, therefore, its Lord and Lawgiver (Eph. 1: 22; Isa. 33:22); and those who truly love Him will endeavor to keep His commandments (John 14:15). In His Holy Word our Lord has entreated believers to perform certain duties one toward another. Such duties, when faithfully performed by all, will have a positive, formative effect upon the whole assembly; and with the blessing of the Holy Spirit we will all be enabled to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Examples of Christian duties that contribute to the formative discipline of the community include the following:

1. To love one another without offense or hypocrisy (John 13:34, 35; Rom. 12:9; 13:8-10).
2. To labor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).
3. To actively seek and pray for the spiritual benefit of the whole body that they all may grow up to be a holy temple in and for the Lord (1 Cor. 14:12-26; Eph. 4:12, 29; 2:21, 22).
4. To watch over one another for good (Phil. 2:3-4).
5. To pray with and for one another (James 5:16).
6. Not to neglect the assembling of ourselves together, for the celebrating of divine worship, and thereby to promote one another's spiritual benefit (Heb. 10:25; Acts 2:42).
7. To contend unanimously for the faith and truth once for all delivered to the saints, as recorded in the Holy Scripture (Ps. 93:5; Zech. 14:2; 1 Cor. 14:33-40; 11:2).

1. Section 2 - Corrective Discipline

When formative discipline fails, corrective discipline becomes necessary to address sinful conduct or heretical doctrine which is contrary to the Word of God. The primary aims of any corrective discipline are the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church, and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender. Every step should be taken with care and much prayer for restoration.

1. Informal corrective discipline – Lovingly encouraging one another to repent of any known sin should be a regular part of our life together as a church body. Reasonable efforts shall be made through counsel and admonition to resolve difficulties, correct errors, and remove offenses before any further action is taken. No offenses shall be brought before the church until the instructions of Christ have first been followed (Matt. 5:23-24; 18:15-16). When restoration is not secured by these initial processes then the matter must be brought before the church (Matt. 18:17). If the elders have not yet been involved then they must now take over leadership of the discipline process. The elders are to investigate the matter, meet with the accused (unless he refuses to appear), hear all the witnesses accessible and give a fair and impartial hearing to all facts ascertainable. The elders must then form a judgment. If they find that the accused has sinned publicly or grievously then they are to call that member to repentance. The possible outcomes of such a proceeding are as follows.

2. Suspension of the repentant - If a member has sinned publicly or grievously, but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the admonitions of church leaders, then severe discipline, such as excommunication, would be improper. Nevertheless, serious offenses may not be overlooked altogether, lest God's enemies multiply their blasphemies, lest other saints be emboldened to sin, and lest the offender is harmed by a failure to test his own soul and appreciate the gravity of his offense. Therefore, at the discretion of the Elders, less severe terms may be imposed upon a member—such as public rebuke or suspension of membership. The latter consists of a temporary suspension of the rights to attend the Lord's Table, to serve publicly in the church or vote in congregational meetings. Those who submit to such discipline are to be wholly forgiven and received as brethren and should continue in fellowship with the body and attendance of all gatherings. All such actions shall be reported to the congregation.

3. Suspension of the unrepentant - If a member has sinned publicly or grievously and has been called to repentance by the elders of the church but has offered no hopeful signs of repentance, it may be necessary to move toward the next step of excommunication. It is proper for the elders, at their discretion, to both publicly rebuke the member and suspend membership while waiting for the duly called congregational meeting as required in the process of excommunication. It is the responsibility of the congregation during this time to add their voice to that of the elders in prayer and in calling the sinning member to repentance and restoration.

4. Excommunication - When a member found to be in public or grievous sin refuses the call to repent then the church must proceed according to the commands of Christ in Matt. 18:17. This process involves responsibilities of both the elders and the congregation.

a. The Elders - The responsibility of the elders is to give a fair and impartial hearing to all the witnesses accessible and facts ascertainable and to form a judgment concerning the accused, the sins committed, and the severity of those sins.. If they believe the accused to be guilty and deserving of severe biblical discipline, and the accused refuses the continued call to repent, they shall call for the offender to be excommunicated at a duly called congregational meeting.

- b. The Congregation - The responsibility of the congregation is to listen to the judgment of the elders and to heed the call for excommunication insofar as it is in accordance with the teaching of scripture. Agreement and consent to the excommunication is to be indicated by a vote of affirmation of at least 2/3 of the voting body. Voting is merely the first step in the congregation's responsibility. They are then called on to carry out the excommunication in not just word but also deed, treating the excommunicated individual as an unbeliever as laid out in scripture. This procedure ought and must include the continued calling of the one excommunicated to repent, believe, and be restored to brotherly fellowship in the church.
- c. Like all corrective discipline, excommunication always has as its end the glory of God, the purity of the body of Christ, and the restoration of the offending party.

5. Restoration - It is the duty of the church to forgive and restore to membership to those persons who give satisfactory evidence of being repentant (II Cor. 2:6-8). The Elders shall meet with and restore those who have been excommunicated or suspended when they have judged that the aims of the discipline have been accomplished. Such action is to be reported to the church and the congregation ought to forgive and fully restore such repentant individuals.

Article VIII - Council of Appeal

Any matter involving controversy within this church, within the elders, or between the congregation and the elders, if it threatens to cause dissension and injury to the welfare of the church, must be called to the attention of the elders. If the elders fail to resolve the difficulty so as to allay dissension, any such matter may be taken to a Council of Appeal.

A Council of Appeal shall be formed at the request of the elders or by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at a duly called congregational meeting. The Council shall consist of the elders and/or deacons and a number of other members (equal to the number of elders and deacons) in good standing to be chosen by the congregation. The congregation shall also appoint a chairman from those on the Council to preside at its meetings.

A quorum for a Council of Appeal shall be four of the officers (Elders and Deacons) and four laymen. If there are less than 5 officers then a quorum shall be the total number of officers minus one with the number of laymen being the same. If a member of the Council is unable to attend a meeting after the judicial process has begun, he may thereafter sit and hear the case but will be disqualified to vote on the final issue of the case.

The resolution of any matter shall require a two-thirds vote of the Council of Appeal. When a final decision of the Council of Appeal is announced to the congregation, that decision is final and the case is ended.

Article IX - Church Office Bearers

1. General Statement

- a. There are two offices in the church, elders and deacons. The calling of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. However, He has ordained that each local church exercise the responsibility of recognizing those whom He has called to be elders and deacons in that

particular church. The number of officers shall not be fixed. The church shall set apart men for each office according to the qualifications for that office and the need of the congregation.

- b. Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (1 Tim 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible. Therefore, each office bearer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership in particular.
- c. The Lord's calling of an individual to either of these offices is recognized by means of that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for the particular office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of office bearers is a matter of such importance that it should never be addressed without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered. Each member of the congregation has a spiritual responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

2. Procedure of Appointment - The recognition of those whom the Lord has called to bear office in this church is executed in four steps: nomination, congregational evaluation, presentation by elders, and ordination.

- a. Nomination - Nominations to either office are made by the eldership. The elders shall nominate to office the men who in their judgment are qualified for that office. Upon nominating such a man, the Scriptural qualifications for the office shall be clearly laid before the people. While it is primarily the responsibility of the elders to nominate men to these offices it is up to the discretion of the elders to involve the congregation in the identification of qualified men. The elders ought also to listen to the voice of members who see necessary gifts and graces evident in fellow members of the church.
- b. Evaluation by the Congregation - After a man has been nominated to the office of elder or deacon, the congregation shall be charged with the responsibility to carefully consider his life and doctrine in light of the Biblical qualifications for a period of at least three months. Any concerns about the candidate should be expressed to him first and, if not resolved, then to the elders as well. As well, during this period, the elders shall seek to canvass the people regarding the qualifications of the man put forth for office.
- c. Presentation by the Elders – If, at any time, concerns are raised such that the elders determine the person is not qualified for the office, they shall announce his removal from consideration. Explanation of a man's removal from consideration ought to be given to the man involved but the extent of explanation given to the congregation is at the discretion of the elders. If in the evaluation of the elders no such disqualifying concerns are evident, and the period of evaluation has confirmed the man as qualified for the office, then the elders of the church shall present their decision for ordination at a duly called congregational meeting. It is then the responsibility of the members of the church to affirm the decision of the elders insofar as it is in accordance with the teachings of scripture. This affirmation must be by 2/3 vote of affirmation of the voting members present at the same duly called congregational meeting.
- d. Ordination - Once the above process has been completed the elders shall set aside time during a regular worship service or a duly called congregational meeting in which the office bearer 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; 1 Tim 5:22).

B. Elders

1. 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). In order that this evidence secure the confidence of the congregation, substantial time shall be afforded for the man and his family to properly gain their confidence.
 2. Elders must seek to discharge their duties as set forth in the Scriptures (particularly in such passages as Acts 20:17, 28ff; 1 Pet 5:1-4; and Heb 13: 17).
 3. While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the other members of the church.
 4. Every elder (pastor) has equal rule in the church, though gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from elder to elder. 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 Tim 5:17ff).
 5. Anyone called to this office must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's Confession of Faith, Covenant, and Constitution. If he should at any time move from this position, he would be under spiritual and moral obligation to immediately make that fact known to the church in an orderly manner.
- C. Deacons - Deacons are responsible primarily to administer the benevolent concerns of the church as well as its business affairs. They must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders (Acts 6:1-4; Heb 13:17; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-13).
- D. Review of Office Bearers - Though a plurality of elders and of deacons is the New Testament norm for every church, the New Testament does not specify the number of elders or deacons each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an officer'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 officer fails to meet the necessary Scriptural qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from being an elder or deacon. An officer may request to be temporarily relieved from the responsibilities of his office for a time if he is providentially hindered from properly discharging his responsibilities. If the elders determine that his qualifications are not in question, and that such a leave of absence is needed, they must establish a specific time after which the officer's case will be discussed by the elders to insure that he is qualified and fit to resume his responsibilities. There may arise occasions in which an office bearer's qualifications are brought into question. On such occasions, the elders (or the other elders, in the case of an elder) are required to carefully consider any confirmed concern regarding such an officer, and publicly rebuke and/or remove him as the situation requires (1Tim 5:19-20).

E. Financial Support of Elders

1. Elders are to be maintained in material necessities and disentangled from the cares of another vocation when appropriate. However, though all elders are equal as to the authority of their office, not all elders possess qualifications warranting full financial support in the office. Therefore, elders may have differing levels of financial support from the church (none, partial, or full), according to these gifts, the needs and capability of the church, and the direction of Christ her Head (1 Tim 5:17ff).
2. The Bible teaches that special ability in ruling the church and, more especially, in public teaching and preaching are gifts worthy of full financial support (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17; 1 Cor 9:1-14). Thus, before undertaking an elder's full support, the congregation must recognize he possesses special ministerial gifts and is excelling in the employment of those gifts for the benefit of the church.
3. Also, before taking on full financial support of an elder (or partial support, if accompanied by an increase of ministry and would hinder the elder's full-time employment in a secular vocation), three important points should be considered:
 - a. it may be more advantageous, in the interests of Christ's Kingdom and of his family, for the elder to maintain a secular vocation;
 - b. a significant portion of the church's financial stewardship is involved, for which its Head will hold it accountable; and
 - c. a fully supported elder has a greater influence upon the congregation, for good or ill.

Article X - Congregational Meetings

1. Definition - A 'duly called congregational meeting' shall be scheduled by the elders and announced at least two weeks prior to the meeting by verbal announcement during two regular worship services as well as an announcement printed in the bulletin for those same two worship services. Other meetings of the congregation should and ought to be called by the elders of the church for any necessary or urgent work of the church; however, only meetings called according to the above requirements meet the definition of a 'duly called congregational meeting'.
2. Conduct - These meetings are to be led by the elders of the church with full participation by all members who are able to attend. Conduct is to be orderly and honoring to Christ in all discussions or engagements, even when the subject of such engagement may at times be difficult or even grievous. The congregation is to give due respect and consideration to the office of the elders as shepherds and leaders of the flock of God. Likewise, the elders are to take great care in leading God's people. They ought not be harsh, overbearing, or domineering but rather lead with gentleness and humility, showing honor to even the least among the congregation. This ought to involve careful and thoughtful explanation of all decisions by the elders and frequent opportunity for the members to ask questions.
3. Congregational voting (or votes of affirmation) - While the elders are the God-appointed leaders of the local congregation and they ought to be followed humbly and with all submissiveness by the members of the church, there must be an acknowledgment that they too are members of the body and in submission to the Spirit of God at work in His people. We acknowledge this reality, as well as the reality that the elders are

fallible men susceptible to the deceptions of sin, by limiting the ability of the elders to proceed on certain matters without obtaining first an affirmation by the assembled congregation. This affirmation is taken in the form of a vote of affirmation requiring 2/3 of the voting members present at a duly called congregational meeting to affirm the course of action proposed by the elders. This vote of affirmation is not to be considered by the individual members of the congregation as a sign that they in some sense hold the ultimate authority over their leaders. Rather, the members are to approach this responsibility with all humility seeking to evaluate their own motives and making their decision in light of the truth of the Scripture alone.

4. Subjects for a Vote of Affirmation - A vote of affirmation is required for the following
 - a. Approval of the yearly budget
 - b. Amendments to the Constitution
 - c. Buying or selling land
 - d. Obtaining a mortgage
 - e. Opening a paid staff position to include adding a salary to one of the elders
 - f. Creating or dissolving formal associations with other churches
 - g. Prior to ordination of an elder or deacon
 - h. Excommunication of a member of the church

5. Procedure for Voting - The subject of a vote must be announced during a duly called business meeting by the elders with the opening of a time of question and answer by the congregation. The voting may proceed by an open vote in most situations; however, if any voting member of the church present at the meeting requests a secret vote by ballot then that is how the vote must proceed. Secret ballot ought to be used in all situations of ordination or excommunication. The ballots are to be collected by the deacons and then counted by at least two of the deacons of the church. If there is only one deacon (or an elder takes this place where no deacon is present) then a second man shall be selected by open vote of the congregation to assist in the counting of the ballots.

6. All members of the church who are at least 18 years old and not under suspension or other disciplinary action are eligible to vote. They must be present at the duly called congregational meeting in which the vote is taken in order to participate in a particular vote.

7. Quorum – In order to consider the congregation to have actually met at a ‘duly called congregational meeting’ then at least ½ of all members eligible to vote must be present at that meeting. If this number is not met then no official votes of affirmation may be taken at that meeting.

Article XI - Amendments

Amendments to the Constitution must be presented by the elders of the church to the congregation at least two weeks prior to a duly called congregational meeting. These amendments may be adopted only with an accompanying two-thirds vote of affirmation by the members present.