

Reformation Baptist Church Constitution

Youngsville, NC

May 27, 2018

The purpose of this constitution is to put forth as clearly as possible those principles which define Reformation Baptist Church, to establish specific rules and regulations for the orderly functioning of the Church, and to define some of the important responsibilities of the members of the Church and of its leadership. We realize that such definition will, of necessity, be incomplete and only perfectly defined by the Scripture itself.

Article I - Doctrinal Positions

1. Essential Doctrines for Salvation

We hold the following doctrines as the minimum requirements for a true and orthodox church, and the minimum doctrinal beliefs necessary for baptism.

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father before all ages, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man; he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried, and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; from thence he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceedeth from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the prophets. In one holy catholic and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism; we look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.¹

We believe that the Holy Scripture, consisting of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments, is the only sufficient, certain, infallible, and inerrant rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience.²

¹ Adapted from the Nicene Creed

² Adapted from the Second London Baptist Confession, Chapter 1

We believe that saving faith, which receives and rests on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification; yet it is not alone in the person justified, but is ever accompanied with all other saving graces, and is no dead faith, but works by love.³

2. Statement of Faith

The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 is the official doctrinal statement of this Church. Elders and Deacons must fully believe and uphold these standards and Elders must teach them.

As the purpose of membership is to join tightly together in a fellowship with like-minded believers for the purpose of laboring together in the Gospel, any potential Member who takes exception to anything in the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 should make their position known to the Elders during the membership interview process. The Elders must inform the Church body of any such exceptions by the potential Member when announcing their desire for membership if the Elders believe those disagreements are substantial. Any Member may request details from either the Elders or the potential Member about the membership interview and such information will not be unreasonably withheld.

Members may take exception to anything not contrary to the *Essential Doctrines for Salvation*, defined in Article I, Section 1, provided they make their disagreements known to the Elders and, at the discretion of the Elders, to the Church body, and that they do not promote dissension regarding the items listed in the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 or in the principles communicated in this constitution.

3. Distinctive Principles and Practices

We hereby commit ourselves to the following principles and practices.

The Great Commission – As followers of Jesus Christ, we have been commanded to fulfill the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and should be ready as a body and as individuals to give an account of how we have attempted to accomplish this command. The church must proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ with clarity, since the gospel is foundational to fulfilling the Great Commission, and must also take seriously its duty to make disciples.⁴ Professing Christians should be expected to grow and mature in doctrine and holiness as the Holy Spirit sanctifies them, both individually and corporately.⁵

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is a central aspect of the Gospel and its power to break the bondage of sin.⁶ After Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, He poured out the Holy Spirit on believers so that the Spirit might guide them into the truth and empower them to live holy lives.⁷ Since Christ has been raised from the dead, believers should walk in newness of life and should no longer be slaves of sin.⁸

³ Adapted from the Second London Baptist Confession, Chapter 11, Paragraph 2

⁴ Matthew 28:18-20

⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18, 7:1; Ephesians 2:19-22, 4:20-24; Hebrews 12:14

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 12-34; Philippians 3:7-11; Revelation 14:6-7

⁷ John 15:26-27, 16:5-15; Acts 2:32-33

⁸ Romans 6:4-6

Expository Preaching – Expository preaching is preaching which attempts to expose the meaning of a text and apply it to the hearers. It is based upon the premise that people need the wisdom of God and not the wisdom of the preacher. We believe that a steady diet of expositional preaching is the most effective way to build up the body of Christ. Preaching and teaching sequentially through the verses of a book of the Bible will be the primary emphasis of this ministry.⁹

Fervent Prayer – Every aspect of the church’s life and ministry ought to be undergirded with regular, fervent prayer. Elements of a godly prayer life (individually and corporately) include adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and intercession.¹⁰

The Regulative Principle of Worship – Since Christ, in His authority as head of His church, has given us the Scriptures as our rule, we will regulate church life by Scripture alone, recognizing that God has instituted in the Scriptures everything He requires for worship in the church and that everything else is prohibited. Therefore, the only permissible elements of worship are those that are instituted by command, precept, example, or by good and necessary consequence, and whatever is not warranted by Scripture is forbidden.¹¹

The activities and worship of the church should be shaped by the Word of God and not by the fruit of her inventions or the patterns of contemporary culture.

Elements of corporate worship include prayer,¹² singing,¹³ Scripture reading,¹⁴ preaching of the Word,¹⁵ interaction,¹⁶ baptism,¹⁷ and the Lord’s Supper.¹⁸ We believe that all these elements of worship of the living God must be marked by Biblical truth, personal and corporate genuineness, and spiritual depth.¹⁹

Loving Community – We will cultivate Christian love, rejoicing, unity, and community in the family of God through mentoring relationships, discipleship, benevolence, and Biblical instruction.²⁰

Church Discipline – We will exercise Biblical church discipline, administered in a spirit of obedience and humility, and believe that this practice glorifies God, promotes the fear of God in

⁹ Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ezra 7:10; Nehemiah 8:1-12; Matthew 4:4; 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5; Titus 1:3, 9; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:22-2:3

¹⁰ Nehemiah 1; Psalm 51; Matthew 6:5-15; Luke 19:46; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:3-12; James 5:13-18

¹¹ Matthew 16:18; Romans 1:16, 10:17

¹² 1 Timothy 2:1; Matthew 21:13

¹³ Ephesians 5:19

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 4:13

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 4:2; Romans 10:14; Acts 8:4

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:26-33

¹⁷ Romans 6:3-4

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 11; Luke 22:19

¹⁹ Psalm 24, 33, 42, 95; Isaiah 6:1-8; Matthew 4:10; John 4:24; Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; Hebrews 13:15; Revelation 4-5

²⁰ Acts 2:44-47, 6:1-7; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Timothy 5:3-8; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 2:3-5; James 1:27

the church, protects the name of God and testimony of the church in the community, defends the purity of the church, and offers restoration to the wayward.²¹

Sabbath – We hold that the keeping of the Sabbath is an important element of Christian life testifying that as our Creator, God has the authority to regulate our work and rest. The keeping of the Sabbath is important for the edification of believers and the growth of the church in holiness. It is also an important part of the church's testimony to the community.²²

This Church will observe the Sabbath from sundown on Saturday to sundown on Sunday. Each individual household has the freedom to observe the Sabbath starting at midnight Saturday night.

Personal Evangelism – We will equip and send the Church and its Members into the community to bring the message of the cross²³ to our own households, neighborhoods, workplaces, and the world.²⁴

Church Planting – We will make intentional efforts to reach the world for Christ by praying, giving, going, and planting as we rejoice in God's plan to be a blessing to the nations.²⁵

The Sufficiency of Scripture – We regard Scripture as sufficient for life and godliness, so it must be consulted for all things. We will use it for reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness to speak into the lives of those in the congregation.²⁶

Theology of Marriage – While God gives the gift of singleness to some, God ordained marriage between one man and one woman as a picture of the gospel relationship of Jesus Christ and His church. Any other sexual arrangement or desiring for such other arrangement is sinful in the sight of God.²⁷

Theology of the Family – We hold that the family was designed by God to be a foundational component of all nations and cultures, and that a believing parent, by God's grace, ought to make their family a vital center of Christian discipleship. As a church we will seek to support and strengthen this important institution for the advancement of God's kingdom.²⁸

We believe that the husband is the head of the home, and that under Christ he is to give godly leadership, seeking to direct his family in the ways of the LORD; that parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual training of their children (this includes discipline and Biblical instruction); and that the goal of Christian parents is to raise up "godly seed" for the LORD.²⁹

We affirm that children are a blessing from God. We condemn the teaching and practice of abortion in any form, including abortion for incest or rape and abortion by chemicals or devices.

²¹ Proverbs 28:13; Matthew 5:23-24, 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, 11:17-34; Galatians 6:1-5; Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Timothy 5:20

²² Leviticus 23:32; Isaiah 58:13

²³ 1 Corinthians 1:18

²⁴ Matthew 28:19-20; John 20:31; Acts 4:12; Romans 10:14-15; 1 Peter 3:15

²⁵ Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 13-14, 16-21

²⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16-17

²⁷ Ephesians 5:22-33

²⁸ Genesis 1:28; Deuteronomy 32:46-47; Psalm 127:1-5

²⁹ Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Proverbs 29:15,17; Malachi 2:15

We hold that a man is to exercise godly dominion over the particular area of life to which God has called him:

1. Over his family, protecting them, providing for them, teaching and guiding them in the ways of God, and maintaining a haven of peace and order.
2. Over the rest of creation, as God has particularly called and enabled him, in church, community life, or civil government.

The wife is given dominion, under the authority of her husband, to be a keeper at home, bearing children, and instilling into them all the virtues and qualities of life, to be a helpmeet and support to her husband in his dominion calling, and to manage the home in a way that is orderly, peaceful, and blessed.³⁰

Diverse Congregation – We recognize that God saves people in various positions in life and has created a position for each person within the body of Christ. We expect this Church to consist of believers, as God brings them, that are young and old, rich and poor, male and female, and from different cultures. The church has a responsibility to minister to the unmarried, the married, the divorced, the widowed, the orphaned, and the adopted. Every believer has distinct needs and a necessary role within the body of Christ.³¹

Age Integration – We believe that the Scriptures, through both teaching and example, establish that the church is one body, and ought not to divide its members. We hold that the worship service ought to include all ages. God has put the vigor of youth with the wisdom of the old in His church. Both need to interact with the other to build the maturity of the church.

Exhorting the Civil Government – As the church of Jesus Christ is the pillar and ground of the truth, this Church, as one of many households of faith in that body, has a duty to declare God's definition of good and evil generally and on specific matters to the civil magistrate in a respectful yet authoritative manner.

Women in the Military – We believe that the Scriptures teach that women should not serve in combat and should not be subject to any conscription.³²

Article II - Church Government

1. Authority in the Church

This Church will be governed by Jesus Christ, by His revealed Word and through the working of the Holy Spirit in the individual men and women who make up Reformation Baptist Church, who shall ideally be overseen by multiple Elders as God sees fit to provide them. This Church recognizes that the Holy Spirit never contradicts the Word because He takes what is Christ's and declares it to His church.³³

³⁰ Genesis 1:27-28; Proverbs 31; Titus 2:4-5

³¹ 1 Corinthians 9:20-22, 12:1-31; 1 Timothy 5:3-5; James 2:1-6

³² Deuteronomy 22:5; Numbers 1

³³ John 16:14

We desire that there be unity in the body of Christ. There is only one bride of Christ to be presented to Him in all holiness and purity. Although we are striving for purity and unity, we realize that the purest of churches under heaven are subject to both mixture and error. As fallen and fallible beings we realize that it is impossible for us to create the perfect church, yet we must strive to be perfect as God is perfect.³⁴

2. Associations

No other governing bodies may exercise authority over or within this Church. Any association of this Church with other individuals, churches, or groups of churches will be considered voluntary.

Informal associations may be entered into at the discretion of the Elders and may be severed at any time if they are considered by the Elders in any way harmful to this Church.

This Church will only join a formal association of churches with a unanimous vote of the Elders and a two-thirds majority of the voting Members. The Church will leave the formal association with a majority vote of both the Elders and the voting Members.

Article III - Church Members

1. Joining the Church

We believe that all believers ought to join a local congregation. We do not believe it is appropriate for people to attend a church for long periods of time without making a covenant with those people to fully join with them in unified ministry. Any believer regularly attending Reformation Baptist Church is expected to become a Member after a reasonable period of time. That length of time may vary depending on the particulars of the situation. Believing children should be under the authority of the Church as well as the authority of their parents, so they should join the Church. Baptism by the Church does not bring anyone into membership, but dependent children who have been attending with their parents ought to join shortly after baptism.

Any individual professing faith in Christ, having been subsequently baptized may be considered a candidate for communicant membership. For membership purposes, Reformation Baptist Church defines baptism as immersing the subject in water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit after professing repentance toward God and faith in, and obedience to, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Elders will publicly announce and recommend all potential candidates for membership at least seven days before they are to be brought into membership.

If anyone thinks that a potential candidate may not be qualified for membership, he is urged to inform the Elders of his opinion, preferably after he has sought to address the concerns directly with the candidate. If the matter cannot be resolved privately between the prospective candidate, concerned individuals, and Elders, the prospective Member may appeal to the congregation. Within a reasonable time, the Elders shall announce a date for a public hearing of the matter, after which the voting Members of the congregation shall decide whether or not to accept the prospective Member by simple majority. The vote may be postponed and

³⁴ Matthew 5:48

rescheduled for a reasonable time after the hearing if the Elders determine that additional information, evidence, or witnesses need to be examined.

The Elders may not recommend a transfer of membership into this body for one who has been excommunicated or who is fleeing Biblical discipline by another true and orthodox church. Upon joining the Church, every Member must take an oath to uphold the Membership Covenant which describes our duties to one another. All Members shall be required to sign a statement signifying that they have read this constitution and agree to submit to it, and that they have sworn to uphold the Membership Covenant.

2. Membership Covenant

The Reformation Baptist Church Membership Covenant shall be:

Having been led, as we believe, by the Spirit of God, to repent, believe, and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior, and to profess our allegiance to Him, having been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, we do now, in the presence of God, angels and this assembly, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one body in Christ.³⁵

We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, we will walk together in Christian love.³⁶

We will seek the salvation of our kindred, acquaintances, and strangers who have not repented for saving faith in Christ, to be in prayer for the spiritual awakening of the lost in our community, and to be a faithful witness of the gospel both here and to the remotest part of the earth.³⁷

We will strive for the advancement of this Church in knowledge, holiness and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines; and to submit to its leaders as they are faithful to Christ.³⁸

We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the Church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.³⁹

We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for ourselves and others, nor avoid the meetings of the Church.⁴⁰

We will also maintain family and private devotions, educate our children in the Christian faith, and demonstrate the love of Christ in all of our household relationships.⁴¹

³⁵ Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 9:23; John 1:12-13, 11:26; Acts 2:38; Romans 8:1; Hebrews 11:6; I Peter 2:6

³⁶ John 13:34; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Ephesians 4:1-6

³⁷ Genesis 12:3; Matthew 28:19; Luke 24:44-48; Acts 1:3-8

³⁸ Romans 8:6; 1 Corinthians 11:1; 2 Corinthians 12:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 4:7-12, 18; Hebrews 10:24-25, 13:17; 3 John 2

³⁹ Job 34:19; Mark 10:21; Luke 4:18; 1 Corinthians 9:1-27

⁴⁰ Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:25; James 5:16

⁴¹ Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Psalm 78; Ephesians 6:1-4

We will strive to watch over one another in brotherly love; remember one another in prayer; aid one another in sickness and distress; walk circumspectly in the world; be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment.⁴²

We will abstain from gluttony, drunkenness, illicit drugs, materials, entertainments, or practices which jeopardize our own or another's faith.⁴³

We will cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and courtesy in speech, and strive to avoid all Scriptural prohibitions, such as tattling, backbiting, and unrighteous anger; to refrain from speaking evil of one another; to be slow to take offense; to think the best of one another; and to always be ready for biblical reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Savior to secure it without delay so far as it depends upon us.⁴⁴

We will, if necessary, submit to biblically defined and regulated church discipline for the purpose of reconciliation with God and man, and we accept that refusing to communicate or to flee is to usurp the power of the Church and break this covenant.⁴⁵

We will, when we move from this place, if possible, unite with a church which upholds the *Essential Doctrines for Salvation* defined in the church constitution and where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant.

3. Church Discipline

a. Purpose of Church Discipline

Church discipline is an important aspect of church life edifying the saints for the work of the ministry.⁴⁶ One corporate aspect of that discipline is chastening.⁴⁷ The local church dealing with sin in obedience to Scripture is one of many means that the Lord uses to chasten His people to bring them to maturity. This chastening can take multiple forms including, but not limited to, private rebuke from the Elders,⁴⁸ elimination of any speaking role in the meeting of the Church, removal from position,⁴⁹ public rebuke,⁵⁰ barring from the Lord's Table, not keeping company with the Members of the Church,⁵¹ and excommunication.⁵²

The church has no right, however, to confiscate goods, forbid conjugal rights, or inflict corporal punishment of any kind. The jurisdiction of the church is separate from the jurisdiction of the state, with the church having an obligation to honor civil laws, insofar as they do not compel the

⁴² Micah 6:8; Matthew 18:15-20; Ephesians 5:1-21, 6:18; Colossians 1:9-10

⁴³ Deuteronomy 21:20; Psalm 1:1-6, 101:1-2; Proverbs 23:21; 1 Corinthians 6:10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:3-12; Colossians 3:1-17

⁴⁴ Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 19:14, 34:13-14; Proverbs 26:20-26; Ecclesiastes 10:11; Matthew 5:21-26; 2 Corinthians 12:20; Romans 1:30; Ephesians 4:29; Titus 3:10; 1 Peter 3:8-12

⁴⁵ Matthew 18:15-20; Luke 17:4; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:1-11; 1 Timothy 1:20; Hebrews 12:11; 1 John 2:19

⁴⁶ Ephesians 4:11-16

⁴⁷ Hebrews 12:3-11

⁴⁸ Galatians 6:1-5; 2 Timothy 4:1-5

⁴⁹ James 3:1

⁵⁰ 1 Timothy 5:20-21

⁵¹ 1 Corinthians 5:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15

⁵² Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13

violation of Scriptural commandments, showing honor as to a minister of God.⁵³ When, in the judgment of the Elders, a Member is guilty or suspected of a crime, he may be required to report or be reported to the civil authorities by the Elders.⁵⁴

b. Church Discipline Process

By joining the Church, the Member acknowledges that the Church has the God-given authority and responsibility to chasten the Member in the case of willful sin, schismatic or divisive behavior, and/or the teaching and promotion of deviant (unorthodox) doctrine. Some chastening can be done by the Elders with the agreement of the Member, but the Member has the right to appeal for a hearing before the congregation if they believe that they are being treated unjustly. In any case which involves participation by the congregation in the discipline, such as when they are not to keep company with the person, the congregation must approve the decision.⁵⁵ When the decision is to be made by the congregation or is appealed to the congregation, the Elders will call a meeting for a trial or deliberation on the matter. The Member will be expected to be present at all such meetings, which will include a description of the reasons for the proposed action, an opportunity for that Member to speak to the congregation, an opportunity for that Member to call witnesses if the facts are in dispute, and an opportunity for voting Members to ask questions of that Member. Other activities during that meeting shall be determined and directed by the Elders. Additional meetings for further fact-finding or deliberation can be called at the determination of the Elders. After due notice, any votes will be held on a Sunday in association with the normal meeting of the Church. A simple majority of all voting Members is required for approving any act of chastening.

c. Removal of Discipline

A church Member under discipline may make a request to the Elders that the discipline be removed. If the discipline was imposed solely by the Elders, then it may then be removed by a majority vote of the Elders. If the discipline was imposed with a vote of the congregation, the Elders must bring the request before the congregation. The discipline may then be removed by a majority of voting Members.

d. Summons before Elders

The Elders, through the authority delegated to them by God through the Church, have the power and authority to call before them, when necessary, any Member of the congregation to inquire into the knowledge and spiritual estate of the Member, to admonish, to rebuke, or to exhort. The Church may also exercise this power directly, as part of a church discipline process, with the consent of a majority of voting Members. This power should not be abused either by frequency or urgency of summoning and if summoned by the Elders, any Member may appeal such a request to the church body. Any Member so summoned has the right to record the meeting if desired, to be provided a recording if the meeting is recorded by the Church or on its behalf, and to bring one or two witnesses to the meeting. Additional witnesses can be brought if necessary to provide information or testimony.

e. Appeal to the Church Body

Unless explicitly stated otherwise in this constitution, any chastisement imposed by the Elders may be appealed to the church body and can be overturned by a two-thirds majority of voting Members. Any such appeal will allow for the Elders and the appealing party to present their positions to the Church and will be regulated as a trial.

⁵³ Romans 13:1-7

⁵⁴ 1 Peter 2:13-14

⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 2:6

4. Obligations of Members

We affirm that each individual Member of the Church has liberty of conscience in those matters of faith and practice where the Church has not reached agreement or has not expressly defined the boundaries of liberty. Each Member, in such cases, is to be convinced in his own mind as to the teaching of Scripture, being careful not to be a stumbling block to others, and is to walk in faith before God. Christian liberty must never be construed as freedom to sin, but as freedom to serve God.⁵⁶

All Members are expected to fulfill the Membership Covenant which is intended to express the duties of a Christian as taught in the Bible. They are expected to uphold and support this Constitution, and protect and support the Church.

Members may hold exceptions to the Statement of Faith on matters not crucial to the essence of the Christian faith, as defined in Article I, Section 1: *Essential Doctrines for Salvation*, so long as they agree to submit to the Church's authority and not spread dissension or disturb the peace of the Church.

5. Transfer of Membership

Transfer of membership from Reformation Baptist Church to another church may be affected by simple request from the Member. The Member seeking transfer should supply the Elders with a reason for leaving Reformation Baptist and must prove that the receiving church is indeed a true and orthodox church which upholds the *Essential Doctrines for Salvation* defined in this constitution. Once the Member has fulfilled these requirements, the Elders must issue a letter of transfer to the authorized representative of the prospective church for all Members in good standing who wish to depart, unless they are under discipline or attempting to avoid issues that could end in church discipline.

6. Renouncing the Faith

In the case where a Member renounces their belief in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, after meeting with the Elders to be admonished related to the seriousness of denying Christ before men⁵⁷ and being given a suitable period for reflection upon the seriousness of the act, the Member will be allowed to deny Christ before the congregation and terminate their membership.

Article IV - Elders

1. Appointment of Elders

We believe the Scriptures teach that the Church should, if possible, be governed by a plurality of Elders called and appointed by God and approved by the Members of the congregation.

⁵⁶ Romans 6:15-23, 14:1-23; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, 10:23-32; Galatians 5:1

⁵⁷ Matthew 10:33

Prospective Elder candidates will be examined, approved, and recommended by a unanimous vote of the Elders and then affirmed by the Church by a minimum of a two-thirds majority of voting Members. An Elder's term will be perpetual and may be terminated only by resignation or removal as allowed by this constitution.

Each Elder candidate must meet all the qualifications outlined for them in Scripture. He must be a Member in good standing of this local body for a minimum of one year prior to being nominated for the office (except at the time of the founding of the Church). This wait will allow him to become familiar with the people, and they with him and his family, along with any peculiar circumstances relating to this Church.

The operation of the Church shall be overseen and directed by the Elders through the Deacons and the church body. The Elders shall strive to maintain harmony and collaboration with the Deacons and the congregation as described in the New Testament.

2. Role of Elders

All Elders shall be equal in ruling status, authority, and title, though they may fulfill different roles in the local body. An Elder must practice the holiness and purity that befits a Christian Elder and lead his family to do the same.

Elders have an obligation to lead the Church through preaching, teaching, exhortation, admonishment, rebuke, and correction. The church body has an obligation in a spirit of meekness to be willing to listen to and to learn from each Elder, to receive exhortation, admonishment, rebuke, or correction as they are provided, to hold the Elders accountable for their actions according to Scripture, and to respectfully disagree with the Elder privately and if the issue is not resolved, publicly as the situation warrants and in accordance with the teaching of Scripture.

3. Lack of Elders

In a situation where there are no Elders, the congregation may examine prospective Elders and appoint them with a two-thirds majority of voting Members. Until such a time as an Elder is appointed, the procedural roles defined in this constitution may be exercised with approval of a majority of voting Members.

4. Duties of Elders

As shepherds of the congregation, the Biblical duties of an Elder include:

1. Protecting the flock from false doctrine and practice,⁵⁸
2. Feeding the flock by preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God from the Scriptures and by the administration of the sacraments,⁵⁹
3. Leading the flock by overseeing the growth of the congregation's holiness in knowledge, doctrine, and practice,⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Acts 20:17, 28-31; Titus 1:5, 9

⁵⁹ John 21:15-17; 1 Timothy 3:2, 4:13, & 5:17

⁶⁰ Luke 6:46-49; Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Peter 5:1-2

4. Equipping the saints for the work of the ministry in its various aspects including discipleship, evangelism, and prayer,⁶¹
5. Promoting multi-generational faithfulness among all in the body and equipping heads of households to lead their homes in worship,⁶²
6. Visiting with and praying for the flock regularly and especially during times of sickness, weakness, or need,⁶³
7. Overseeing the exercise of church discipline.⁶⁴

5. Removal of Elders

If anyone believes an Elder may be morally or doctrinally unfit for his office, he is to approach that Elder individually first, and then with one or two others.⁶⁵ If the problem remains, then two or three witnesses should come to the other Elders and present the charges.⁶⁶ In the case where there is reasonable perceived physical risk, or if the Elder refuses to communicate with the witnesses, two or three witnesses can come directly to the other Elders and present the charges.

If a majority of the other Elders decide that the question merits an investigation and/or trial based on Biblical principles as discerned by the Elders who have not been charged, then they will inform the Members of the Church of the nature of the charges, announce the dates of the scheduled investigation and/or trial, and encourage the Members to attend. The Elders, with the accused Elder not having a vote unless there are only two active Elders, can suspend, by a majority of their votes, the accused Elder from all duties pending the investigation and/or trial once such an investigation and/or trial is scheduled.

If charges are brought against one or more Elders, charges may not be brought against another Elder until the original matter has been adjudicated.

If the charges are sustained by a majority of the Elders (the accused Elder not having a vote), the Elder will be rebuked in the presence of the congregation.⁶⁷ The other Elders will determine if other discipline, such as removal from office, is appropriate depending on other factors such as the gravity of the charges and the response to correction. If the other Elders believe that further discipline pertaining to the office of eldership is appropriate, they will present a recommendation to the congregation. Execution of further disciplinary action requires a majority of voting Members of the congregation. In the case of removal from office, the former Elder may still be subjected to the normal process of church discipline.

In the case when there is only one Elder, the two or three witnesses are permitted to bring the matter directly to the congregation, which may call a meeting of the Church for an investigation and/or trial based on Biblical principles.

⁶¹ Matthew 28:16-20; Ephesians 4:7-16

⁶² Deuteronomy 6:1-9; Malachi 4:6

⁶³ Romans 15:24; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12; 2 John 1:12

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:34; Titus 1:5

⁶⁵ Matthew 18:15-16

⁶⁶ 1 Timothy 5:19

⁶⁷ 1 Timothy 5:20

Article V - Deacons

1. Office of Deacon

The Diaconate will oversee the special care of the poor and needy and other duties as assigned by the Elders, so that the Elders may be devoted to the ministry of the Word, prayer, and shepherding the Church.

The Scriptures teach the office of Deacon as a distinct office in the Church with a focus of service to the Church, especially benevolence, and with no authority to rule. All Deacons must meet the qualifications outlined for them in the Scriptures. A Deacon must practice the holiness and purity that befits his office and lead his family to do the same. A Deacon's wife must meet the qualifications defined in Scripture.⁶⁸

2. Appointment of Deacons

Prospective Deacon candidates must be nominated by the congregation and chosen by a two-thirds majority of voting Members. After being so nominated and chosen by the congregation, a candidate will be examined by the Elders and, if approved by a two-thirds majority of the Elders, installed as a Deacon. A Deacon's term is perpetual and may be terminated only by resignation or removal as defined by this constitution.

A Deacon must be a Member in good standing of this local Church for a minimum of one year prior to being nominated for the office.

3. Duties of Deacons

The duties of a Deacon include:

1. Ministering to those within the congregation who are needy, sick, and any who may be in distress, especially widows and orphans,⁶⁹
2. Devising effective methods of collecting the gifts of the people, and distributing these gifts for the purpose for which they were contributed,⁷⁰
3. Engaging in tasks which support the Biblical requirements for the Elders in their ministry,⁷¹
4. Setting an example to other members in matters of spirituality, dedication, and character.⁷²

Although Deacons may be asked to share in the teaching duties of the Church from time to time, the function of the office of Deacon is not to teach, but to serve the Church.

The Diaconate may draw up the budget under the supervision and approval of the Elders. All financial matters are subject to Elder approval.

⁶⁸ 1 Timothy 3:11

⁶⁹ Acts 6:1-7

⁷⁰ Acts 6:1-7

⁷¹ Acts 6:1-7

⁷² 1 Timothy 3:8-13

4. Removal of Deacons

If anyone believes a Deacon may be morally or doctrinally unfit for his office, or may be unable to perform the duties of his office, he is to approach that Deacon individually first,⁷³ and then with one or two others.⁷⁴ If the problem remains, then the two or three witnesses should come to the Elders and present the charges. In the case where there is reasonable perceived physical risk, or if the Deacon refuses to communicate with the witnesses, a witness can come directly to the Elders and present the charges. The Elders may also prepare charges against a Deacon.

If a majority of the Elders believe the charges have merit, they may proceed with an investigation. The investigation must give the Deacon an opportunity to meet with the Elders and address the charges against him. The Elders, at their discretion, may also hold a trial as defined in this Constitution.

At the end of the investigation, if the charges are sustained by a vote of the majority of the Elders, they will determine if discipline related to the office is appropriate, such as rebuke or removal from office, depending on other factors such as the gravity of the charges and the response to correction.

If the Elders vote to remove the Deacon from office, they must announce the reasons to this Church. The Deacon, at his request, may have an opportunity to address the charges before this Church if he has not already done so during a trial. If the Deacon is removed from office for moral or doctrinal reasons he may still be subjected to the normal process of church discipline.

Article VI - The Lord's Supper

This Church will practice "open communion," allowing non-members and visitors to participate in the Lord's Supper if they profess faith in Jesus Christ, have been baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (either as a believer, which is in accordance with the doctrine of this Church, or as an infant if it is in accordance with the belief of their true and orthodox church), are not banned from the Lord's Supper by their true and orthodox church, and are not in unrepentant sin. The Lord's Supper will not be open to those who are banned from the Lord's Supper until they speak with the Elders and the Elders agree that the person in question was subjected to unbiblical church discipline.

Children are not to partake of the Lord's Supper until they do acknowledge and discern the Lord's body, demonstrate true Christian character, confess Christ, and are baptized, lest they eat and drink judgment upon themselves and upon the congregation.⁷⁵

The Lord's Supper is:

- A remembrance of Christ⁷⁶
- A time of communion with Him, in which, in faith, spiritual grace is conferred⁷⁷

⁷³ Matthew 18:15

⁷⁴ Matthew 18:16

⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:29-30

⁷⁶ Luke 22:19

⁷⁷ John 6:54-55; 1 Corinthians 10:16

- A time of fellowship with the body of Christ and especially with the local body⁷⁸
- A commemoration of His death.⁷⁹

Article VII - Church Administration

1. Business Meetings

The Elders shall gather the church body for regular meetings at convenient and set times to discuss the business of the Church. These meetings shall be overseen by the Elders and shall happen no less than once per year. The church finances will be reviewed at a regular meeting at least annually. Any Member, or group of Members, with the support of two thirds of the voting Members of the Church, may call for a business meeting of the Church.

2. Preaching

Public preaching of the Scriptures under the authority of the Church shall be regulated by the Elders and done only by those approved by the Church.⁸⁰ This preaching consists of sermons to the congregation, street preaching, and other occasions as defined by the Elders.

If the Elders wish anyone to preach who is not an Elder at this Church, the Elders must submit their name to the Church at least ten days in advance. The permission to preach may be limited in scope or venue, and can be either temporary or permanent.

If any Member objects to the proposed preacher during the ten days, or at any subsequent time, he should inform the Elders of his concerns. If the Member's concerns are not resolved, he may request a church vote. Upon the request of at least two voting Members, the Elders must call for a vote and inform the Church of the concerns of the objecting Members. The preacher must then be approved by a majority of voting Members.

If a need for a preacher arises when there is no time to obtain the approval of the congregation, the Elders may appoint someone to preach if no one already approved by the congregation is available.

3. Meetings of Elders and Deacons

The Elders and Deacons of the Church are both to meet at convenient and set times, for the well-ordering of the affairs of the congregation. They are to meet separately and, if the Elders deem necessary, jointly.

4. Voting

Notice of any vote of the Members will be given by email, or by other similar methods, at least seven days in advance, unless this Constitution specifies otherwise. This requirement may be waived by a unanimous vote of the Elders. Proxy votes will be received from absent Members in

⁷⁸ 1 Corinthians 11:18, 20

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:26

⁸⁰ Second London Baptist Confession of 1689, Chapter 26, Paragraph 11.

good standing through a process approved by the Elders. The roll call of any vote of the Members will be made available to any church Member upon request.

5. Voting Members

Voting Members shall consist of all Members who are male heads of households in good standing. Adult sons living in their father's household are not considered heads of households. Since male headship is established in the church by God, it is not Biblically proper for a woman (unmarried, divorced, or widowed) to take leadership, teach men, or vote in the congregation.⁸¹ A single woman who is a head of household shall designate to the Elders a voting Member (e.g. father, grandfather, older brother, son, or family friend) to cast votes for her household. She may change her designee unless a vote has been officially scheduled.

A Member shall be defined as in good standing who does not forsake the assembly of the saints⁸² except for reasonable circumstances such as prolonged illness, and who is not currently under church discipline. A Member may be out of good standing, but this standing not publicly known, in cases of church discipline where the matter is before the Elders but has not been made known to the Church publicly. A Member declared out of good standing or not a head of household by the Elders may appeal their standing before the congregation and be reinstated by a two-thirds majority vote of those Members whose standing is not in question. The Elders have the ongoing responsibility to keep individual Members aware of their eligibility to vote.

Members who are not regularly attending church meetings for any reason shall not be considered Members in good standing for the purposes of voting. Any debatable instances of whether someone is regularly attending will be decided by a simple majority of the Elders. The decision of the Elders, in this instance, can be overruled by a two-thirds majority vote of those Members whose standing is not in question.

6. Trials

The purpose of any trial held under the authority of Reformation Baptist Church is to clearly, faithfully, and publicly resolve a dispute in a just and equitable manner. For this to be achieved, the rules governing the trial must be ordered to cause the issue to be brought into the light, so the dispute can be judged according to Scripture. The rules governing any specific trial must be written and available to any Member upon request. It is the duty of all Members to listen to all trials of the Church and to attend if reasonable, and the Elders shall encourage them to do so.

Any trial recordings, transcripts, or other trial documents must be made available to any individuals who were Members at any time during the trial.

Trials shall be scheduled at reasonable times and shall allow for both sides to present evidence and call and cross-examine witnesses. No trial shall be scheduled on the Sabbath. No more than one trial meeting shall be scheduled Monday through Friday in a given week. No trial shall be scheduled to start before six pm Monday through Friday or nine am on Saturday. A trial shall adjourn until the next scheduled day after six hours of hearings in any twenty-four hour period or if continuing would cause the trial to extend beyond ten pm unless it is the expectation of both sides that the trial will conclude before eleven pm. These time limits can be overruled by a two-

⁸¹ 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Corinthians 11:3

⁸² Hebrews 10:24-25

thirds majority vote of voting members, and this vote may be called without the usual seven days notice to the Members.

7. Property

The Church shall have the right to own, buy, or sell real property via trust or other legal means. The authorization to purchase real property requires a unanimous vote of the Elders and a two-thirds majority of the voting Members. The authorization to buy and sell property does not authorize the Church to take on debt. The Church is prohibited from taking on financial debt by the principles of Scripture.⁸³

Article VIII - Dissolution

In the event of the dissolution of this Church, all of its tangible assets and holdings shall be distributed to one or more other existing churches which are in agreement with the Statement of Faith. Recognition of the dissolution of the Church, and all other decisions appertaining thereunto will be made by a majority of voting Members of this Church.

Article IX - Revisions and Amendments

1. Amendment Process

Revisions and/or amendments to this constitution may be added from time to time as this Church sees necessary. A unanimous vote of the Elders is required to bring any changes to this constitution before the church body, and the proposed changes must be ratified by a two-thirds vote of voting Members.

2. Changing the Membership Covenant

If an amendment is made to the Membership Covenant contained in this Constitution, the Church shall hold a public reading of the revised Covenant either the Sunday of the vote or the next Sunday. Each member shall swear to the revised Covenant or announce their unwillingness to do so, either at that time or as soon after as practical. No Member shall lose their membership or be disciplined if they choose not to adopt the revised Covenant and will continue to be bound under their previous oath.

⁸³ Proverbs 22:7, Galatians 5:1, Philippians 4:19, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Deuteronomy 28:12, Isaiah 31:1, Psalm 37:21

Endnotes

This document contains a series of endnotes. The purpose of these notes is to provide additional context to a part of the constitution. Endnotes are meant to be descriptive rather than prescriptive in nature and have no regulative authority. Endnotes may only be added or modified through the revision and amendment process described in the constitution.

Endnote 1 - Church Planting

The constitution previously contained the following provision for Elders that was related to a split in the membership between a planting church and one that had been planted:

Elders must be members in good standing in the church except in the case of a church plant. In that instance, if the membership is split, the Elders will maintain their eldership in both churches until such time as there is a plurality of Elders in both churches, or in the case of resignation or removal according to Biblical guidelines. Each Elder's membership will reside in the church he regularly attends.

While this process made sense at the time, it was specific to the circumstances and did have negative consequences. It was moved to an Endnote so that the text and history would not be lost.

Endnote 2 - Meeting Frequency

Reformation Baptist Church was founded out of a church split from Hope Baptist Church. At Hope Baptist men's meetings were infrequent and there was a congregational expectation that the Elders would handle almost all issues. One of the changes that we attempted to make in the church culture was to place an emphasis on men's meetings where business affecting the church is discussed. When the church was first founded, men's meetings were held weekly prior to Wednesday night prayer. Two years later, the meetings were still being held bi-weekly, but there was discussion of decreasing the frequency (during this time period the church was also establishing a prosthetic clinic ministry in Nigeria and dealing with the ouster and criminal prosecution of Isaac Oluwole Newton-Wusu)

Endnote 3 - Trials

The section on trials was added because an accused elder at another church forced his trial to conclude without possibility of adjournment. It started on a weeknight at 7:00pm and ran all night through the following morning to 6:30 am. This occurred for multiple reasons, one of which was that the members of the church allowed it through passivity, complacency, and a general abdication of responsibility.