

Rules and Regulations
governing the life and conduct of
.....
(insert name of church)

NOTE

This document is supplied for guidance only and churches are at liberty to adapt the rules and regulations to meet their own understanding of Scripture and to suit their own local situation.

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A. INTRODUCTION

This local church exists in order to fulfil a threefold purpose:

- a) The worship of God in Spirit and Truth
(John 4:23).

- b) The edification and encouragement of the body of believers
(Ephesians 4:16, Hebrews 10:24-25).

- c) The fulfilment of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations
(Matthew 28:19).

B. BASIS OF FAITH

The Holy Scriptures contained in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments are the only rule or standard that God has given the churches to govern all matters of faith and practice.

As its subordinate standard, the Church recognises the 1966 Baptist Affirmation of Faith, which is summarised below:

1. The verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments and that they are the sole, supreme, and all-sufficient authority in every matter of Christian faith and practice.
2. One living and only true God, subsisting in the Trinity of Three co-equal and co-eternal Persons - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; all infinite without beginning; the Father neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.
3. The Deity, eternal Sonship, and spotless humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ; His virgin birth, crucifixion, death, and burial; His physical resurrection, and ascension into heaven.
4. The personal, eternal, and unconditional election of the Church in Christ unto everlasting salvation.
5. The Fall of mankind in Adam their federal head whose transgression is imputed to them, and from whom they derive a corrupt nature, thereby rendering them both unable and unwilling to meet the claims of God's righteous and holy law.
6. That though all men are rendered spiritually impotent by the Fall, they are none the less accountable to God for their sins, and they shall answer for the same in the day of judgement except they be granted repentance unto eternal life.
7. The special, particular, and eternal redemption from all sin, and the penal consequence thereof, of all God's elect, through the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. The eternal and everlasting justification through faith of the elect and redeemed Church, by the blood and imputed righteousness of Christ, irrespective of any moral or spiritual works done by them either before or after regeneration.
9. The effectual calling of all the redeemed by the invincible power and grace of the Holy Spirit, according to the counsel of God's will, involving their regeneration and sanctification by the direct agency of the Holy Spirit, through which the saints grow in grace perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.
10. The grace of faith whereby the elect are enabled to believe to the saving of their souls is the gift of God, and the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, who convinces them of sin, works in them repentance unto life, and enables them to look to, receive, and rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation.
11. The final perseverance in the ways of God of all those who have been chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, so that they shall never perish, but have eternal life.

12. The second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust, when the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment and the righteous into life eternal.
13. The duty and privilege of all true believers to profess their repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, by being baptized, that is, immersed in water, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, prior to becoming members of a Christian Church or partaking of the Lord's Supper.
14. The preaching of the Gospel to every creature as a divine command and solemn duty.
15. The necessity of a believer's life being consistent with the profession he makes.
16. The congregational order of the churches.

C. RULES AND REGULATIONS

1 Church Membership

1.1 Biblical Basis for Church Membership

According to the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) there is an inseparable connection between making disciples, baptising them and teaching them. The apostles implemented this commission by gathering baptised believers into local churches teaching them all that Christ had commanded (Acts 2:38-42, Acts 20:20-21, 1 Corinthians 4:17). With the exceptions of the dying thief on the cross (Luke 23:42-43) and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37-38), the New Testament records nothing of believing men and women who were not members of local churches. All believers are required by Christ to observe the Lord's Supper which is clearly a local church ordinance (1 Corinthians 11 cf 1 Corinthians 1:1-2). It follows that all Bible believing Christians ought to belong to a visible local church to partake Biblically of the Lord's Supper.

1.2 Qualifications for Church Membership

A person wishing to be a member of the Church must give a credible profession of faith in Christ and:

- accept the beliefs of the Church,
- meet the Church's requirement for baptism,
- be accepted as a member at the church members' meeting,
- acknowledge the responsibilities of a church member,
- abide by the decisions of the church members' meeting, and
- be committed to serving Christ within the Church and beyond.

1.3 Requirement for Baptism

A person wishing to be a member of the Church must have been baptised in accordance with the requirements of clause 3.1.

1.4 Application for Membership

A person wishing to become a church member shall apply to the elders who will arrange for the candidate to be interviewed by two spiritually mature church members. They must assess whether the applicant meets the Church's criteria for membership and submit a report to the church members' meeting at which the application is being considered.

1.5 Procedure at Church Members' Meetings

Applicants for membership will normally be required to give testimony at an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting. If accepted, the new member will normally be welcomed publicly.

1.6 Transfers from Other Churches

Where an applicant has previously been a member of another evangelical church a recommendation from that church will normally be required.

1.7 The Discipline of Church Members

The Church may discipline members whose standards of conduct fall short of those laid down for Christians in the New Testament. As a spiritual society, the Church may impose only spiritual penalties such as suspension of privileges, excommunication, and, in the last resort, expulsion from membership. The primary aim of discipline shall be the restoration of the offender and the matter shall not be brought before a church members' meeting until private attempts have been made to bring about repentance. Examples of conduct justifying disciplinary action, all of which shall be deemed sufficient to justify expulsion from membership, are:

- uncharitable conduct towards others
- immorality
- schism
- heresy
- unwillingness to submit to the legitimate authority of the Church
- failure to attend the Lord's Supper for 12 months, without good cause

1.8 Termination of Church Membership

Church membership may be terminated in one of the following ways:

1.8.1 Transfer

If church members move away from the area they will be encouraged to attend a like-minded church and the elders will, if requested, write a letter of commendation to facilitate transfer of membership to the new church. Such a letter may also be provided, at the elders' discretion, when a member transfers allegiance to another evangelical church within the neighbourhood. No letter of commendation will be written if disciplinary action is in force or anticipated against the member concerned.

1.8.2 Withdrawal

The Church prefers not to recognise the practice of resignation but it is legally possible for church members to resign their membership. Resignation also occurs when church members cease to attend the means of grace and, in effect, withdraw themselves from the fellowship of the Church without either transferring to another church or giving satisfactory reasons for their non-attendance. The Church will then withdraw from those members, recognising that they have already withdrawn from the Church.

1.8.3 Death

Church members who die are regarded as having transferred their membership from the church militant on earth to the church triumphant in heaven.

1.8.4 Expulsion

Where the conduct of a member is considered to be contrary to the purpose and beliefs of the Church or disruptive to relationships between members, the elders may recommend to an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting that the membership of that person be reviewed. The meeting shall consider the allegations against the member who shall be given the opportunity to hear the allegations and to speak in his or her defence before withdrawing from the meeting. The meeting shall then decide whether to terminate the membership of the person concerned. A person whose membership has been so terminated shall be entitled, with the support of four other members, to appeal to a Special Church Members' Meeting.

2. Church Officers

This Church recognises two spiritual offices within the Church: elders and deacons, and one legal office: charity trustees.

2.1 Elders

2.1.1 The Function of Elders

The task of elders is to serve the Church through oversight, ruling and teaching. They are responsible for:

- overseeing the conduct of public worship.
- the administration of the ordinances of believers' baptism and the Lord's Supper.
- preserving purity of doctrine and the maintenance of discipline among members.
- supervising all meetings and organisations connected with the Church including the oversight of those responsible for any other ministries of the Church.

2.1.2 Qualifications for Elders

Only male members of the Church with the necessary qualifications as laid down in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are eligible to serve as elders. In view of the responsibility the elders bear for the teaching ministry of the Church they must hold unreservedly to the Church's Basis of Faith.

2.1.3 Number of Elders

The Church is responsible for recognising the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite graces and gifts. As the composition of the membership of the Church may change, the number of elders will not be fixed.

2.1.4 Term of Office

With the exception of a pastor (as defined in clause 2.1.5), elders shall retire from office after serving for a period of five years, but they shall be eligible for reappointment in accordance with the procedures set out in clause 2.1.6.

2.1.5 Equality and Diversity of Elders

All the elders are equal in office and authority but will vary in their gifts so as to complement one another. Some will be engaged in public preaching and teaching more than others. This Church recognises the Scriptural principle that at least one of the elders should be remunerated in order to enable him to devote himself more effectively to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Such an elder is referred to as a 'pastor'. Prospective pastors (whether members of this Church or of another church) shall be nominated by the eldership but church members may suggest candidates to the elders for consideration. If the elders are in agreement, the nomination shall be considered at a Special Church Members' Meeting. If the elders do not agree, they shall explain their reasons to the member making the suggestion who (if supported by four other members) may require the matter to be considered at a Special Church Members' Meeting.

2.1.6 The Recognition of Elders

Prospective elders shall be nominated by the eldership. Church members may suggest candidates to the elders for consideration and if the elders are in agreement, the nomination shall be considered at a Special Church Members' Meeting. If the elders do not agree they shall explain their reasons to the member making the suggestion who (if supported by four other members) may require the matter to be considered at a Special Church Members' Meeting.

2.1.7 The Discipline and Termination of Elders

2.1.7.1 Should an elder fail to uphold the doctrinal standards of the Church, bring reproach on the Church and the name of Christ, or otherwise be considered unable to discharge his duties, the other elders will consider the matter either on their own initiative or upon the request of four church members. If the matter is not resolved it will be referred to a Special Church Members' Meeting. The meeting shall consider the allegations against the elder who shall be given the opportunity to hear the allegations and to speak in his defence before withdrawing from the meeting. The meeting shall then decide whether any action is required. Such action may include removing the elder from the eldership.

2.1.7.2 An elder may resign his office if he can no longer discharge his duties.

2.1.7.3 Pastors should not lightly consider leaving the flock over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers to labour in some other sphere of service. They should consult with the other elders and the whole Church and be willing to give due weight to the counsel given. At least three months notice must be given by the pastor to the Church, or by the Church to the pastor, if either party wishes to terminate his appointment.

2.2 Deacons

2.2.1 The Function of Deacons

2.2.1.1 The task of the deacons is to relieve the elders of involvement in the material affairs of the Church so that their distinctive ministries of prayer and the ministry of the Word are not neglected. The duties of deacons, while spiritual in nature, include the general administration of the Church and the practical care of the members.

2.2.1.2 If the Church has no elders, the deacons shall assume temporary, but full, responsibility for the government of the Church and shall act in the place of elders where these Rules and Regulations require elders to act. In the absence of elders, and at their own discretion, the deacons may seek advice from elders of other churches.

2.2.2 Qualifications for Deacons

Only male members of the Church with the necessary qualifications as laid down in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 are eligible to serve as deacons. Since it may be necessary for the deacons to act as elders (albeit in exceptional circumstances) it shall be a requirement that they hold unreservedly to the Church's Basis of Faith.

2.2.3 Number of Deacons

The Church is responsible for recognising the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite graces and gifts. As the composition of the membership of the Church may change, the number of deacons will not be fixed.

2.2.4 Term of Office

Deacons shall retire from office after serving for a period of five years, but they shall be eligible for reappointment in accordance with the procedures set out in clause 2.2.5.

2.2.5 The Recognition of Deacons

Prospective deacons shall be nominated by the eldership. Church members may suggest candidates to the elders for consideration and if the elders are in agreement, the nomination shall be considered at an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting. If the elders do not agree they shall explain their reasons to the member making the suggestion who may, with the support of four other members, propose the candidate for nomination. Such a proposal shall be made in writing and given to the Church Secretary at least ten days before an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting. Two-thirds of the votes cast by members present and entitled to vote shall be required for the appointment of a deacon.

2.2.6 The Discipline and Termination of Deacons

2.2.6.1 Should a deacon fail to uphold the doctrinal standards of the Church, bring reproach on the Church and the name of Christ, or otherwise be considered unable to discharge his duties the elders will consider the matter either on their own initiative or upon the request of four church members. If the matter is unresolved it will be referred to an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting. The meeting shall consider the allegations against the deacon who shall be given the opportunity to hear the allegations and to speak in his defence before withdrawing from the meeting. The meeting shall then decide whether any action is required. Such action may involve removing the deacon from the diaconate. Two-thirds of the votes by members present and entitled to vote shall be required for the removal of a deacon.

2.2.6.2 A deacon may resign his office if he can no longer discharge his duties.

2.2.7 Church Secretary and Church Treasurer

The church members shall appoint a Church Secretary and a Church Treasurer, preferably from among the deacons, at an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting.

2.3 Charity Trustees

Clause 6.1 of the Church Charity Constitution states which officers serve as charity trustees and that there must be a minimum of three at all times. In the event of the total number falling below three, the church members' meeting shall appoint additional persons, as necessary, to act as charity trustees but only for as long as the total number of stated officers remains below three. Charity trustees appointed under this clause shall be appointed in accordance with the procedure for appointing deacons as specified in clause 2.2.5.

3. Church Ordinances

This church recognises only two ordinances that Christ has commanded churches to observe, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

3.1 Baptism

3.1.1 The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is a public profession and pledge of union with Christ in his death, burial and resurrection.

3.1.2 The Subjects for Baptism

Christian believers alone are fit subjects for the ordinance of baptism. People who have not experienced the inward grace ought not to receive the outward sign that testifies to it. Baptism is a necessary part of Christian obedience. The New Testament does not envisage baptised unbelievers or un-baptised believers. Persons being baptised are normally expected to become church members.

3.1.3 The Mode of Baptism

Immersion in water is the mode which best expresses both the meaning of the term and the symbolism of death, burial and resurrection. Immersion will therefore be the only mode the Church will use except in cases of infirmity or medical necessity, where effusion will be permitted.

3.1.4 Application for Baptism

A person wishing to be baptised shall apply to the elders who will arrange for the candidate to be interviewed by two spiritually mature church members who must assess whether the applicant meets the church's criteria for baptism. Those members should then submit a report to the Ordinary Church Members' Meeting at which the application is being considered. Applicants will normally be required to give testimony at the meeting.

3.2 The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance of the New Testament, the principles of which are that:

- a particular local church (1 Corinthians 1:2),
- on the Lord's Day (1 Corinthians 11:25-26, Acts 20:7),
- together eats a ceremonial meal (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 33-34),
- consisting of bread and wine (1 Corinthians 11:23-26),
- distributed to all by Christ's servants (1 Corinthians 11:24),
- in which that gathered church symbolises its spiritual nourishment by Christ's body and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 11:24-25), and
- proclaims the death of Christ and his atonement for sin (1 Corinthians 11:26).

3.2.1 This ordinance is to continue until the return of Christ. The bread and wine are, and remain, only symbols of the broken body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ but those who partake feed by faith upon the living Christ who is present with, but not in, the elements.

3.2.2 In order to maintain the purity of this ordinance, the elders will seek to ensure that only members of this Church, or believers who have been baptised by immersion and who are members in good standing of other churches, are admitted to the ordinance. Believers who are visiting the Church on a temporary basis and whose convictions mean that they cannot conscientiously become members of a Baptist Church may be admitted to the Lord's Supper at the discretion of the elders.

4. Church Members' Meetings

4.1 The Purpose of Church Members' Meetings

Church members meet together in a church members' meeting under the Lordship of Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in subjection to the Scriptures, to discern the mind of God in the affairs of the Church.

4.2 Ordinary and Special Church Members' Meetings

4.2.1 There are two types of formal church members' meetings: Ordinary Church Members' Meetings and Special Church Members' Meetings.

4.2.2 Ordinary Church Members' Meetings shall be held as and when necessary but on not less than three occasions in any calendar year.

4.2.3 One Ordinary Church Members' Meeting each year shall be constituted as the Annual General Meeting for members to receive annual accounts and reports, to appoint auditors or independent examiners, and to consider proposals for the strategy and vision of the Church in the coming year, with other appropriate matters.

4.2.4 A Special Church Members' Meeting shall be convened when necessary to consider the appointment or dismissal of elders and pastors, matters relating to the acquisition or disposal of or major alterations to church property, the closure of the Church, or matters considered by the elders to be of sufficient importance to require the calling of a Special Church Members' Meeting.

4.2.5 If the business for a meeting cannot reasonably be concluded in one session, the meeting may be adjourned to another convenient date.

4.3 Convening Church Members' Meetings

4.3.1 Church members' meetings shall be convened by the elders so as to be as convenient for as many church members as is reasonable.

4.3.2 An Ordinary Church Members' Meeting shall be properly convened if the date, time and place for the meeting are publicised at the worship service or services on the previous two Sundays.

4.3.3 A Special Church Members' Meeting shall be properly convened if the date, time and place for the meeting are publicised at the public worship service or services on the two previous Sundays. In addition, members shall be given written notice containing as full an indication of the matters to be considered as possible.

4.3.4 Additional church members' meetings, whether special or ordinary, shall be convened by the elders as necessary, and they shall convene a Special Church Members' Meeting as soon as possible in the event of an application as provided by these Rules and Regulations or upon the receipt of a written request signed by at least one fifth of the church membership.

4.3.5 Apart from guests invited by the elders, only members of the Church shall attend a church members' meeting.

4.4 The Conduct of Church Members' Meetings

- 4.4.1** Worship, including prayer and the reading of Scripture, shall be a key feature of the church members' meeting. The discussion of any matters affecting the life and activities of the Church shall be set in this context with the intention that, so far as possible, practical issues are not perceived as being separate from the spiritual aspects of the Church.
- 4.4.2** A quorum of one third of the membership shall apply to church members' meetings.
- 4.4.3** The pastor is entitled to chair the church members' meeting. If he prefers not to do so, has a conflict of interest, or if there is no pastor, the meeting shall elect a Chairman by a simple majority before proceeding with the business of the meeting.
- 4.4.4** Proceedings at church members' meetings must be kept confidential unless their disclosure is authorised by the elders.

4.5 Voting

- 4.5.1** Members shall, so far as possible, seek consensus on all matters considered at a church members' meeting.
- 4.5.2** For matters requiring a formal decision, a vote shall be taken and the outcome of the vote recorded as the resolution of the members.
- 4.5.3** Each member shall have one vote which they may use at the church members' meeting after hearing about the issues and any comments or questions raised by other members.
- 4.5.4** No proxy votes shall be allowed and no postal votes shall be valid.
- 4.5.5** If any matter requires a decision affecting or involving individuals, or if any embarrassment might arise by a public vote, a secret ballot shall be held if agreed by the church members' meeting.
- 4.5.6** If a secret ballot is to be held two members will be appointed as scrutineers to the ballot to count the votes. The Chairman shall announce the outcome without necessarily revealing the numbers of votes.
- 4.5.7** Except as provided in clause 2.2.5 and 2.2.6.1, a resolution at an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting shall be carried if supported by a majority of the members present and entitled to vote.
- 4.5.8** If there is an equality of votes on any matter at an Ordinary Church Members' Meeting the Chairman shall have a casting vote in addition to his vote as a member. This shall be cast at his discretion but would normally be cast against the motion.
- 4.5.9** A resolution at a Special Church Members' Meeting shall be carried if supported by at least three quarters of the members present and entitled to vote. Only those persons who have been members of the Church for a minimum of six months and have attended at least one service of communion at the Lord's Table in the last six months may vote at a Special Church Meeting.
- 4.5.10** Although members of any age may attend and participate in a church members' meeting, the minimum age for voting shall be 18.

4.6 Minutes

- 4.6.1** The business conducted at church members' meetings and, in particular, any decisions of the members shall be recorded in the minutes for future reference.
- 4.6.2** The minutes shall be written or printed and filed in a book or binder set aside for this purpose using materials of sufficient quality to ensure that they survive for many years and shall be kept in a safe place.
- 4.6.3** Each set of minutes shall be approved by the church members at a church members' meeting. They shall have the opportunity to review the minutes and to correct any errors of fact before a formal vote on the approval of the minutes is taken. If the minutes are approved, the Chairman shall confirm the members' acceptance of the minutes by signing and dating them as a correct record of the preceding meeting.
- 4.6.4** The signed minutes shall be conclusive evidence of the decisions taken at the church members' meeting to which they relate.

5. Power of Amendment

5.1 Amendment Clause

These Rules and Regulations may be amended by a resolution passed at a Special Church Members' Meeting.