

# **Providence Reformed Baptist Church Constitution.**

As a church entrusted with the spiritual care of the members, as well as the disbursement of the tithes and offerings, Providence Reformed Baptist Church has adopted this constitution in order to enable the church to operate in an orderly fashion.

## **ARTICLE 1 – NAME**

The name of this church shall be Providence Reformed Baptist Church (PRBC).

## **ARTICLE 2 – PURPOSE**

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures by maintaining and promoting His worship both individually and corporately, by evangelizing sinners, and by edifying His saints. Therefore, we are committed to the proclamation of God's perfect Law and of the glorious gospel of His grace throughout all of the world, to the defense of that "faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), and to the pure and faithful celebration of the ordinances of the New Covenant.

## **ARTICLE 3 – ARTICLES OF FAITH**

The Holy Bible is the final and only authority in all matters of faith and practice. We accept and adopt the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689, as the most accurate expression of that system of doctrine taught in the Bible. We do not hold this Confession of Faith to be above or equal to the Holy Scriptures, rather, we accept it as an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and an instrument of edification and instruction. This Confession provides every member with a compact body of divinity, and by means of the scriptural proofs, each one can be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him.

As an addendum to the Confession, we believe that in this age the work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ; to convict men of sin, righteousness, and judgment; to regenerate sinners; and to indwell, seal, lead, instruct, and empower every believer for godly living and service. We also believe that while the Holy Spirit gives each Christian spiritual abilities or gifts for service, there were temporary, foundational, and confirmatory sign gifts of the early church, which have passed away and are not being given by Him today. These temporary, foundational, and confirmatory sign gifts are: the gifts of apostles, prophets (prophecy), healing, miracles, faith (which is different from saving faith), a word of knowledge, a word of wisdom, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues. The ceasing and passing away of the sign gifts was brought about by the completion and canonization of the New Testament, which with the Old Testament constitutes the perfect and all-sufficient Word of God (John 16:7-13; 14:17; Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 12:1-3; 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:1-16). We believe that although God can, and does, choose to make His glory known by working supernaturally in the world and in human affairs, He no longer equips humans to affect those miracles.

## **ARTICLE 4 – AFFILIATION**

**4.1 Authority.** We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Head of the Church (Eph. 5:23) and who directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture (Acts 14:21-23; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand

under the authority of Holy Scripture.

**4.2 Cooperation.** The church may and does cooperate with other like-minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern (2 Cor. 1:11; 8:18-24; Phil. 4:15-19). We may seek the assistance and counsel (Prov. 11:14; 18:1) of other churches in matters of special concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church (Acts 14:21-23).

**4.3 Associations.** One special kind of fellowship and cooperation with other churches is formal membership in an association of churches. Upon recommendation of the elders, such affiliations may be entered with the expressed consent and approval of the congregation (Acts 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19). Withdrawal from such associations may be affected by the same.

## **ARTICLE 5 – CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

**5.1 Warrant For Membership.** The New Testament demands of all Christians a formal, open, solemn, voluntary, and enduring commitment to Jesus Christ, to His truth, and to His people. A true Christian's commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ must include, and is inseparable from, his commitment to Christ's truth and to Christ's people. Such a commitment to Christ, His truth, and His people ordinarily requires a formal, open, solemn, voluntary, and enduring commitment of church membership in a local church for the following biblical reasons:

**5.1.1 The Great Commission.** Fulfillment of Christ's Great Commission requires church membership. According to the Great Commission of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20), there is an inseparable connection between making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them. The Apostles implemented this Commission by gathering baptized disciples into local churches. It was, therefore, in local churches that baptized disciples were taught all that Christ commanded (Acts 2:38-47; 1 Cor. 4:17). With the uncertain exception of the Ethiopian eunuch, the New Testament knows nothing of believing men and women who are not members of local churches.

**5.1.2 The Biblical Pattern.** The New Testament presents the local church as a distinct group of individuals which could be counted (Acts 2:41-42; 4:4), be added to or excluded from (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 9:26), be called upon to select leaders and representatives from among itself (Acts 6:1-6; 2 Cor. 8:19, 23; Acts 15:22), be officially gathered together (Acts 14:27; 15:22), carry out church discipline by common consent (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6), and observe the Lord's Table as a wholly present corporate assembly (1 Cor. 11:17-20, 33-34). There is therefore clear biblical warrant for the existence and careful maintenance of local church membership involving a formal, open, solemn, voluntary, and enduring commitment. This biblical warrant compels us to use great care in maintaining a biblically-ordered church membership.

**5.1.3 Pastoral Oversight.** It is only in the context of the local church with identifiable members and overseers that the biblical injunctions regarding the relationship of pastors and people can be fulfilled (1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:17).

## **5.2 Prerequisites For Membership**

**5.2.1 General Requirements.** To be eligible for membership, a man or woman (Acts 5:14; 8:3,12) must demonstrate repentance toward God and the fruits thereof (Acts 26:20), as well as that faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21) which produces godly works (Eph. 2:8-10; James 2:18, 22). He must be baptized as a believer, and to the satisfaction of the elders, express substantial agreement with the purpose (as stated in Article 2), Covenant (as stated in Article 5.7), Confession (as stated in Article 3), and government of this church (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8:1-8). Furthermore, he must not be under the biblically warranted (Matt. 18:17, 18; 1 Cor. 5:11-13; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14, 15; 3 John 9, 10; 2 Cor. 2:6-8) corrective discipline of a genuine church.

**5.2.2 Conformity of Doctrine and Polity.** Mastery of church confession is not required of any disciple before he is admitted to church membership. Such a requirement would violate the order of Matt. 28:19-20, which instructs us to disciple, to baptize, and then to teach the baptized disciple to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded. It is necessary, however, that any disciple applying for membership manifest a willingness to be taught and to be in substantial agreement with what he already knows concerning the church's doctrine and government. Church members must be in submission to the ordained rule of the church to which they belong (Heb. 13:17). He who cannot intelligently and freely submit to the church's government should not belong to that church. Anyone who is in substantial disagreement with the constitution or confession of the church could not be consistently submissive to the church's teaching ministry. Therefore, to admit such a person to membership in this church would be unwise and unscriptural (Eph. 4:3). If one who is already a member of the church at any time concludes that he no longer satisfies the requirements for membership, he is under obligation to inform the elders of that fact.

## **5.3 Membership Process**

**5.3.1 The Scriptural Pattern.** The Scriptural pattern for the reception of new members involves careful inquiry into the potential member's fitness according to the prerequisites detailed in 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 above. Members are received only upon the recommendation of the elders and by the consent of the church.

**5.3.2 New Members Class.** A person who desires to become a member of the church shall apply to the elders and request an interview. During the interview the elders will seek to determine whether that person meets the prerequisites for membership. The elders will normally require the completion of the new member's class. Through the use of the Baptist Catechism, this class thoroughly exposes the potential member to the doctrines of the church (as laid out in the LBC 1689), as well as the privileges and

responsibilities of membership. This class is taught by the elders, which allows them to get to know the potential members and gives the potential members an opportunity to walk closely with the elders before they covenant themselves to membership. At the completion of the class, the elders will interview each prospective member with a view of being certain that the applicant is committed to the responsibilities of church membership and in substantial agreement with, and cheerfully submissive to, the doctrines and practices of the church. Those whom the elders believe are qualified will be recommended to the church for membership. Those who are deemed unqualified will not be recommended for membership, but encouraged to seek from the Lord that which is necessary to become qualified.

**5.3.3 Prior Memberships.** If the applicant is or has been a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine the person's standing in that church and his reasons for leaving (Acts 15: 1-2 with 24-25). If said church raises an objection, which the elders consider valid, the applicant may be denied membership at the discretion of the elders.

**5.3.4 Reception.** If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership, they shall announce the name to the congregation for at least two Lord's Days prior to the Lord's Day on which those applicants are to be received. This time period is for the purpose of enabling the members to raise any questions or objections concerning the applicant's qualifications (Acts 9:26-29). Members are expected to consider this a personal duty of the most serious character. They are expected to voice privately to the elders all questions or objections that have not yet been resolved, after personal contact has been made with the applicant (Matt. 18:15ff; Lev. 19:16-17). If no objection, which the elders consider to be valid, is raised, the person will be received into the membership by decision of the elders. Their reception will be publicly announced at the next stated meeting of the church (Matt. 3:6-12; 1 John 4:1; Rev. 2:2). The elders may postpone the reception of the person into membership until proper investigation can be made concerning objections, which in their judgment are sufficiently serious.

## **5.4 Types Of Membership**

**5.4.1 Regular Members.** All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedures set forth in Section 5.3, who continue in regular attendance at the stated meetings of the church, and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church as set forth in Article 7, shall be considered regular members in good standing and entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church (Acts 2:37-47).

**5.4.2 Minor Members.** Believing that all those who credibly profess faith in Christ ought to be baptized and joined to the church, PRBC Church will receive into membership young people who have not yet reached the age of eighteen. The light of nature and Christian prudence teach that it is inappropriate to allow such members to vote in meetings of the church. Accordingly, after their eighteenth birthday, those originally

received as minor members will be permitted to vote, provided that they are members in good standing.

**5.4.3 Temporary Members.** Persons who come to live in our area for a limited period of time (e.g., students, military personnel, persons on special work assignments) may be received into or removed from the membership of the church on the same basis and in the same manner as persons who have permanent residence in our area. If such a person is already a member of a church in his place of permanent residence, he need not be released from the membership of his home church, but will be regarded as a temporary member while in our midst. A temporary member shall not be allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church. Other than voting, temporary members enjoy all the rights and privileges and are subject to all the responsibilities, liabilities, and disciplines of regular membership. When such a person terminates his period of temporary residence in good standing, he will be released to the fellowship of his home church and no longer be regarded as a member of this church (compare: Acts 18:27; Rom. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 3:1f; Col. 4:10; 3 John 5-10).

**5.4.4 Associate Members.** Regular members who move away from our area and who cannot find another local church with which they can conscientiously unite will, at their request, be retained as associate members of this church. Such persons must retain regular communication with the church in order to maintain their associate membership. Nevertheless, they are urged to seek diligently a church with which they can unite elsewhere. An associate member shall not be allowed to vote in any business meeting of the church. At the discretion of the elders, associate membership may be granted to invalids, Christian workers, and others whose relation to the church involves unusual circumstances.

## **5.5 Termination Of Membership**

### **5.5.1 Types of Termination.**

**5.5.1.1 By Physical Death.** When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall be transferred to the file of former members.

#### **5.5.1.2 By Transfer**

**5.5.1.2.1 Basis And Procedure For.** Because the New Testament norm for Christians is that they be members of true local churches of Christ, and because the spiritual health of believers is endangered when they are not thus committed to a church, any Christian who leaves the membership of this church should seek to do so by means of transfer to another true church of Christ. Therefore, if a church member in good standing whose conduct does not warrant corrective discipline

desires to leave the membership of this church, he is strongly urged to leave in an orderly way by privately indicating that desire to the elders along with his reasons for leaving, and by submitting a request to the elders for a transfer of membership to another true church of Christ (Acts 18:27).

**5.5.1.2.2 Prolongation Of.** When such a departing member has not yet chosen a suitable church to which he may transfer, the elders may provide, if he wishes, for a transitional period, which will allow the departing member to decide where he wishes to be transferred. Such a transitional status will be allowed to continue as long as the departing member maintains regular contact with the elders, does not unnecessarily prolong the transitional process, and does not engage in conduct requiring the exercise of church discipline.

**5.5.1.2.3 Letter Of.** When it is so requested, the elders may transfer a departing member of good standing to the fellowship of another church. A letter of transfer will be sent to the appropriate officer(s) of the church to which the member wishes to transfer. No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is in their judgment disloyal to “the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3) or which does not exercise godly care over its members.

**5.5.1.3 By Resignation.** Membership in this church is entered into and initiated jointly by voluntary commitment from the individual applicant and acceptance by the church (as described in Section 5.3.4). As a general rule, a member may voluntarily resign from membership in this church. However, members cannot terminate their membership unilaterally under all circumstances. A resignation offered to frustrate or thwart the procedures of corrective discipline is not valid, and the church may proceed with public censure, imposition of strictures, or excommunication in accordance with the procedures outlined in Article 7 (Acts 15:24; 1 John 2:18-19 with 2 John 7-11).

**5.5.1.4 By Exclusion.** If a member ceases to faithfully attend the stated meetings of the church (Section 5.7.3) without showing just cause, or if upon relocation ceases to maintain a vital contact with the church, he may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the elders. In such cases, the elders shall try to contact the person to rectify and resolve the situation (Heb. 13:17). If these efforts are ineffective, the elders shall inform that person (when possible) and the congregation that he is no longer a member. If a person not guilty of heresy, scandalous immorality, or divisiveness, either renounces his commitment to keep any of the requirements of membership listed in Section 5.7, or ceases without just cause to practice any of them as a pattern of life, and yet wishes to remain in membership, refusing to resign

voluntarily, he may be excluded, but only after repeated admonition from the elders (2 Tim. 2:24-26). In such cases the elders shall announce to the congregation at a stated meeting their intention to exclude the person. Time will be allowed for objections or questions to be raised privately with the elders by any member. If no objection is raised which the elders consider valid, the person will be excluded by action of the elders. The congregation and the person shall be informed of this action.

**5.5.1.5 By Excommunication.** According to the teaching of Holy Scripture, a church must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false heretical doctrine, who blatantly or persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity, peace, or purity of the church (Matt. 18:15ff; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; Titus 3:10-11). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in Section 7.3.4 of this constitution.

## **5.5.2 Implications of Termination.**

**5.5.2.1 Disclosure To Saints.** PRBC does not exist in isolation from, but is part of, the universal church of Christ composed of all true churches. Accordingly, open and forthright communication among the churches is vital for the purity, peace, edification, and unity of the church universal. Therefore, the elders may, at their discretion, disclose to the members of this church and to other churches the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Acts 15:24; 1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:10; 1 John 2:18,19).

**5.5.2.2 Disclosure To Society.** In addition, the PRBC Church does not exist in isolation from society at large. Accordingly, this church has a moral obligation to society both to act with integrity and to maintain its testimony (2 Cor. 8:20-21). Therefore, the elders may, at their discretion, disclose to other persons outside the ecclesiastical circles mentioned above, the circumstances under which a person's membership was terminated (Lev. 5:1; Prov. 29:24; 1 Pet. 4:15).

**5.5.2.3 Divisiveness In.** Termination of membership does not give license to former members to sow discord, spread false teachings or reports, or engage in any other behavior which threatens the peace and unity of this church or the church universal. Accordingly, when it is established that a former member is behaving divisively, the elders may issue whatever warnings they deem appropriate to maintain and preserve the peace and harmony of this church and the church universal (Acts 15:24-31; Rom. 16:17-20; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; 4:10; 1 John 2:18-19).

**5.6 Privileges Of Membership.** In God's order, commitment normally constitutes the pathway to the possession of privileges. Therefore, membership in this church includes the following privileges:

**5.6.1** Participation in the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:41-42; 1 Cor. 11:23-26);

**5.6.2** Attendance at, appropriate participation in, and voting during church business meetings (Acts 6:11-6 [cf. Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:13-14]; 1 Cor. 5:4-7 [cf. 1 Cor. 1:2]);

**5.6.3** Laboring to extend God's Kingdom in ministries of the church (as one's gifts, graces, and calling make appropriate) (Rom. 12:3-21; Eph. 4:7, 11-12, 16; 1 Pet. 4:10-11);

**5.6.4** Reception of the committed oversight and care of the elders of the church (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3);

**5.6.5** Reception of the committed care and discipline (as needed) of the membership of the church (Acts 6:1-2 [cf. Acts 2:41; 5:13-14; 9:26]; 1 Cor. 5: 4-5 [cf. 1 Cor. 1:2]; Gal. 6:10).

## **5.7 Members' Commitment To The Body (Membership Covenant)**

**5.7.1** I am a Christian who has been saved from my sins by the grace of Jesus Christ. I have been baptized as a believer to give testimony of my identification with the body of Christ and obedience to the Scriptures.

**5.7.2** I have read, understood, and affirm PRBC's doctrinal statement (London Baptist Confession of 1689) and constitution and agree to not be divisive to its teaching. I also understand the importance of submission to church leadership and will be diligent to preserve unity and peace (Heb. 13:7, 17; Eph. 4:1-3).

**5.7.3** I will endeavor to maintain a close relationship with the Lord through regular personal Bible reading, prayer, fellowship, and practice of the other spiritual disciplines. My journey in Christ will be evident through my regular participation in the corporate worship services, regular attendance at all membership meetings, and in the learning opportunities that are provided through the church, as well as involvement in life together (Ps. 119:97, 105; Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:23-25).

**5.7.4** I will strive to properly manage the resources God has given me, including my time, body, gifts and talents, attitudes, finances, and possessions (Eph. 5:15-18; Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:1-16; Gal. 5:22-26; Prov. 3:9-10). This includes faithful tithing to PRBC that is sacrificial and cheerful (2 Cor. 8; 9).

**5.7.5** I commit myself to the PRBC family and agree to aid in fulfilling its missional purpose to live according to, and bring the gospel to the County of Orange and beyond.

**5.7.6** I commit to leverage the holy desires and natural abilities that God has given me for the building up of the church, both at PRBC and universally (1 Pet. 4:10-11; Rom. 12:1-8; 1 Cor. 12:7-31).

**5.7.7** I covenant to practice the humility and sacrificial attitude of Christ by considering the needs of others (Phil. 2:1-11), not gossiping (Prov. 16:28; Matt. 18:15-17), and nurturing deep Christian friendships. (Prov. 17:17).

**5.7.8** I covenant to have friendly Christian relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ from other churches, but I will not function in leadership or as a member in another church family (Heb. 13:17).

**5.7.9** I covenant to follow the biblical procedures of church discipline and submit myself to discipline if the need should ever arise (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1-5).

**5.7.10** I covenant to submit to the authority of the Scriptures as the final arbiter on all issues (Ps. 119; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

**5.7.11** God enabling me, I will strive to consider my commitment to this Membership Covenant on a yearly basis. I understand that it is an evaluative tool, as well as an affirmation of my continuing conviction and purpose. My responsibility will be to meet with the elders of PRBC if at any time I become unwilling to fulfill my membership vows, if I can no longer affirm the doctrinal affirmations of this covenant, or if I have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding PRBC.

## **ARTICLE 6 – GOVERNMENT**

### **6.1 General Statement**

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church (Col. 1:18). He has ordained that individual churches should be governed by Himself through officers whom He appoints, who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Christ has ordained that local churches are to be administered by elders and deacons. Beside these two offices, the Scriptures acknowledge no office that continues in the church today (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).

### **6.2 Prerequisites**

**6.2.1 Conformity.** Any individual set apart to one of these offices must conscientiously be able to affirm his agreement with the church's confession of faith 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 elders in an orderly manner.

**6.2.2 Gender.** While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given women and

the valuable assistance they may render to the officers of the church (Rom. 16:1-16; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11), the Bible prohibits women from holding either the office of deacon or elder in the church (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7). Women, therefore, shall not be nominated, elected, or ordained to either of these offices in the church. It is also contrary to Scripture for any woman to exercise headship or leadership in a formal meeting of the church where adult men are present, either by leading in prayer, reading the Scriptures, administering the sacraments, or ministering the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15). Since it is also a violation of the Scriptures for a woman to exercise authority over a man in spiritual things outside a meeting of the church, no woman shall be appointed to a teaching or authoritative function in a ministry of the church where adult men would be regularly under her ministry. Nevertheless, we acknowledge and encourage the valuable gifts and assistance of women in the formal instruction of children and other women (Titus 2:3-5), in the informal instruction even of men (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 18:26), and in the diaconal and especially the benevolent ministries of the church (1 Tim. 5:9-10).

## **6.3 Elders**

**6.3.1 Terminology.** Those who have been called of God to rule and teach in the church are called elders, pastors, or overseers (sometimes translated “bishops”). These three titles are interchangeable and designate one and the same office in a New Testament church (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11,12; Titus 1:5, 7).

**6.3.2 Qualifications.** 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).

**6.3.3 Authority.** Because the authority of the elders of the church is human authority exercised in the house of God, it has both high prerogatives and important limitations. When elders exercise this authority by requiring obedience to their leadership, they must seek to gain the consciences through the ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb.13:17).

**6.3.3.1 Its Limited Authority.** The authority of the elders does not include the right to make certain decisions unilaterally. In major decisions of church life (such as those having to do with the admission of new members, corrective discipline, recognition of officers, and the sale or purchase of a church building or real estate), the local church as a whole has a voice (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 13; 2 Cor. 2:6). Yet the elders must provide definitive leadership to the church in the making of decisions (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4-5; 13; 2 Cor. 2:6).

**6.3.3.2 Its Local Authority.** The authority of the elders is limited to the sphere of the

local church. Thus, they will not require punishments for sin beyond those of biblical church discipline, will not invade the biblically-defined spheres of other divinely-ordained human authorities (husbands, fathers, civil rulers, and employers), and will not command God's people regarding matters not specified in Scripture except to order the house of God by the application of His Word (Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14; Acts 20:28; Rom. 13: 1-7; 1 Cor. 7:25-28, 35-40; Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Pet. 5:2-3).

**6.3.3.3 Its Accountable Authority.** The authority of elders is conditioned by the fact that they are themselves members of the local church. While elders are shepherds over the flock, they are also members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is entitled to the same privileges, is obligated by the same responsibilities, and is subject to the same discipline as are all the other members of the church. Thus, each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and accountable to the church as a whole (Matt. 18:15-17; 23:8-9; Gal. 2:11; 3 John 1: 9-10).

**6.3.3.4 Its Shared Authority.** The authority of every elder is the same. Thus, every elder has equal rule in the church. Though gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from elder to elder, this diversity must not undermine real parity among the elders (Acts 20:17, 28; Gal. 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17).

**6.3.3.5 It Is Real Authority.** The Scriptures designate the elders as those who "rule" in the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:17; note also the scriptural titles and functions of the office). God's people are, therefore, required to submit when such authority is biblically exercised.

**6.3.4 Duties Of The Elders.** The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct perspective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions. The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

**6.3.4.1 Diversity Among Elders.** While every elder should be "apt to teach", some will be more engaged in formal and public teaching while others will be more engaged in pastoring (that is, private teaching and admonishing) and governing (1 Tim. 5:17a). The abilities of each man will be considered by the council of elders in assigning responsibilities. Elders gifted for preaching shall participate in the preaching of the church.

**6.3.4.2 Pastoral Visits.** One crucial aspect of the elders' duties is personally

overseeing the flock of God. Fulfillment of this duty shall include regularly and systematically meeting with each member of the church on at least an annual basis, except when physically impossible due to distance.

**6.3.4.3 Meeting Leadership.** Another crucial aspect of the duties of elders is exercising leadership with regard to the meetings and worship of the church. The elders shall appoint such meetings as they believe good for the spiritual health of the church and assure that they are conducted to the glory of God and according to the provisions of His Word.

**6.3.4.4 Staff and Committees.** The elders may establish ministry positions or committees to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The elders may also propose funding for new paid staff positions. The scope and approval of job descriptions for any staff position shall reside in the hands of those with hiring authority for that position. Funding for paid positions shall be approved by the membership as part of the budget approval process. The elders shall have primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, and evaluation of staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to another staff member.

**6.3.4.5 Officiating Wedding Ceremonies.** The elder(s) of PRBC may, if asked by any member(s) of PRBC in good standing, officiate the wedding ceremony of those who are lawfully permitted to marry according to the Word of God and as outlined in chapter 25 of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith after the elder(s) and the couple to be married have completed formal premarital counseling of no fewer than four sessions.

The elder(s) of PRBC shall not officiate the marriage ceremony of any individual(s) who does not meet the following criteria:

- 1) a current member of PRBC in good standing,
- 2) or a past member of PRBC who is now a member in good standing of a biblically faithful local church of Christ,
- 3) or a member in good standing of a SCARBC or ARBCA local church that is in full subscription to the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith.

**6.3.5 Remuneration.** 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 Cor. 9:4-14; 1 Tim. 5:17-18).

**6.3.6 Plurality.** A plurality of elders appears to be a New Testament norm for every church. Ordinarily, God may be expected to give elders in plurality to a church. However, if there is but one, this is not to be considered irregular. The New Testament does not specify the number of elders each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an elder'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 elder fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications for his office does he disqualify himself from being an elder. An elder may honorably resign from his office for a time if he is providentially hindered from properly discharging his pastoral duties.

**6.3.7 Absence Of.** Should the office of elder be vacant, the deacons shall call a church meeting over which one of their members shall preside. At this meeting, the church by vote shall place herself under the temporary guidance of the elders of a like-minded Reformed Baptist Church who strictly subscribe to the LBC 1689. This guidance shall remain in effect until removed by congregational vote. A two-thirds majority of those voting members present is necessary to approve these motions.

## **6.4 Deacons**

**6.4.1 Purpose.** The office of Deacon was ordained by the Apostles to enable the ministers of the Word to concentrate on the specific functions of their office, namely preaching, teaching, counseling, and prayer (Acts 6:1-6; 20:20, 31; Eph. 4:11-13). Deacons are primarily responsible to administer the benevolent and business affairs of the church.

**6.4.2 Qualifications.** The qualifications for the office of deacon are almost identical with those for the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5). The only contrast between the qualifying standards for both offices is that the elders must be “apt to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2).

**6.4.3 Number.** The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed from among the men who evidence the scriptural qualifications for the office (Acts 6:1-6; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

**6.4.4 Relationship to the Elders.** Scripture indicates that elders have authority over diaconal concerns (Acts 6:2-4; 11:30). The deacons, therefore, must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders.

**6.4.5 Business Affairs.** The deacons shall have general executive powers to administer the business affairs of the church. It shall be the deacons’ responsibility to prepare the church budget and submit it to a joint session of the council of elders and the board of deacons each year. Upon reaching joint agreement to the proposed budget, the elders will submit the budget to the members for commitment by a three-fourths vote of those present. It is the deacons’ responsibility to administer the budget. The duty of caring for and maintaining the church’s properties shall belong to the deacons.

**6.4.6 Assistance.** Deacons may appoint members of the church to assist them in the administration of the specific areas of their work, while maintaining responsibility and authority over those areas.

**6.4.7 Removal.** No term of office shall be fixed for deacons. If a deacon fails to meet the necessary Scriptural qualifications for his office, he may be removed from office according to the provisions of section 6.6 of this article.

## **6.5 Appointment Of Officers**

**6.5.1 General Statement.** The appointment of elders and deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. He has ordained, however, that each local church exercise the responsibility of recognizing those whom He is appointing to be elders and deacons in that particular church. Elders and deacons are ordained, or appointed, to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (Acts 6:6; 1 Tim. 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (1 Tim. 5:22). Therefore, each officer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership in particular. The Lord's appointment 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 (1 Tim. 3:1-7). The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never be pursued 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 church has a spiritual responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

**6.5.2 Procedure of Appointment.** The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church is executed in three steps: nomination, election, and ordination.

**6.5.2.1 Nomination.** Nominations to either office are made by the eldership. At least once every year at the annual business meeting an advisory ballot shall be taken. On this ballot every voting member may write the name of any male member(s) and the office for which he believes that member to be qualified. Those men named by twenty-five percent or more of the members present will then be considered by the elders. If the elders agree that the nominees are suitable, they will be notified and asked whether they will accept the nomination.

**6.5.2.2 Election.** Any church meeting for the election of officers shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days previous to its being held. The nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. During the discussion the nominee under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the assembly. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the nominee's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the nominee. Concerning the vote, the church should seek unity of mind, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election. This vote shall take place by written ballot subsequent to a full and free discussion oriented to the relevant scriptural passages.

**6.5.2.3 Ordination.** Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer 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). The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer-elect.

## **6.6 Review Of Officers**

**6.6.1 Regular Review.** There shall be a review of each officer's qualifications for office four years after his ordination into the church and every fourth year thereafter for as long as he occupies the office in this church. The procedure for review is outlined in Section 6.6.3.

**6.6.2 Untimely Review.** There may arise reasons that would require an officer to be reviewed before the regularly scheduled time. Such a review meeting may be called by a majority of the elders (or a majority of the other elders of an associated church in the case of a single elder). The members may also request such a meeting. This request can only be made after two or three witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19) have met with the officer in an attempt to resolve the issues of concern. The request must be set forth in writing with the signatures of one-third of the voting members in good standing. It must be presented to the elders, who shall, in turn, make the proper announcement of the meeting. Such a review meeting would also follow the procedure of Section 6.6.3.

**6.6.3 Procedure For Review.** Any meeting for the review of an officer shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. There shall be discussion and a vote by written ballot regarding the officer under review. During the discussion the officer under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the assembly. The scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the officer's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the officer. Any member who publicly suggests in such a meeting that the officer being reviewed is unqualified for his office must have previously spoken with the officer himself and informed the elders of the church of his concerns (1 Tim. 5:19). He must also present biblical and factual warrant for his concerns at the review meeting. Just as it is wrong for a church to retain an officer who is not biblically qualified, so also it is rebellion against the Head of the Church to reject an officer for anything other than biblical grounds. Additionally, any officer about whom such concerns are raised must be permitted, if he wishes, to return to the meeting and defend himself. Concerning the vote, the church should seek unity of mind, but should such unity not be fully realized, no fewer than three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for the confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing confirmation, no longer holds office in the church.

**6.6.4 Resignation.** An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion and for good and valid reasons. This resignation together with its reasons and the date upon which he wishes his resignation to be effective shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the church.

## **6.7 Full Support Elders**

**6.7.1 Warrant For Full Support Elders.** Though all elders are equal as to the authority of their office, not all elders are equal in possessing the qualifications warranting financial support in the office. 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 the church undertakes the full support of an elder, it must recognize that he (or a nominee to the eldership) possesses special ministerial gifts. He should be presently excelling in the exercise of those gifts for the benefit of the church in ways appropriate to his opportunities. Caution should be exercised before fully supporting an elder because: (1) full support necessitates his removal from a secular vocation, which in the interests of Christ's kingdom and of his family, might be a more advantageous position for him to occupy; (2) a significant portion of the church's financial stewardship is involved, for which Christ will hold it accountable; and (3) a fully supported elder has a greater influence upon the church, for good or ill. Any financial support required by a degree of ministry that would hinder an elder's full-time employment in a secular vocation is subject to the provisions of this section.

**6.7.1.1 Full Support Defined.** Full support means that not only does the elder not need to engage in employment outside of the church, but, if he is married, neither does his wife, so that she can minister to the needs of the household and to the children (Titus 2:1-5), while her husband devotes himself completely to his office. According to LBC 26.10 "It is incumbent on the churches to whom [full support] elders minister, not only to give them all due respect, but also to communicate to them of all their good things according to their ability, so as they may have a comfortable supply, without being themselves entangled in secular affairs; and may also be capable of exercising hospitality towards others, and this is required by the law of nature, and by the express order of our Lord Jesus, who has ordained that they that preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel."

**6.7.1.2 Partial Support.** It may be beneficial to the church to partially support some elders who possess the gifting and graces which allow them to excel particularly at the public teaching and preaching of the Word, but who also are willing to work bi-vocationally. Should the existing elders recognize this gifting, and the funding be available, they can recommend that a particular elder be partially supported by the church.

**6.7.1.3 Supporting Multiple Elders.** The members shall not endeavor to fully or partially support any additional elders until such time as they have faithfully fulfilled their commitment to any other fully supported elders, and then only as they are able financially to do so.

## **6.7.2 Full And Partial Support Recommendation Process.**

**6.7.2.1 Originates With The Elders.** The elders may recommend to the church that an existing elder or nominee to the eldership be fully or partially supported.

**6.7.2.2 Member Notification.** In the case of a nominee, full or partial support may be considered in conjunction with the consideration of his qualifications for the eldership. In such a case, the elders will inform the church of their recommendation when a business meeting for this purpose is announced. A separate discussion and vote for both election to the office and full support in the office are not necessary.

**6.7.2.3 Existing Elder.** In the case of an existing elder who is being recommended for full or partial support, a church meeting to consider this recommendation shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held.

**6.7.2.4 Meeting Procedure.** During any meeting, where full or partial support is being considered, special attention shall be given to the relevant teaching of Scripture (Gal. 6.6; 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). During the discussion, the man under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the meeting until a written ballot is taken. Such discussion must reflect the fear of God, the claims of truth, and the gravity of the matter. Any vote for full or partial support requires approval by three-fourths of the ballots cast.

**6.7.2.5 Supported Elder Review.** The full or partial support of elders is subject to review in distinction from his simple continuance in office. Any meeting for such a review shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. During the discussion the elder under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the meeting until a written ballot is taken. The relevant scriptural qualifications must form the basis of the discussion and decision of the church. The church should seek unanimity concerning the matter, but if such unanimity is not realized, and two-thirds of those voting do not affirm the continuation of full support, it will be terminated by this vote.

**6.7.2.6 Voluntary Withdrawal From Support.** An officer may withdraw from full or partial support and the duties it entails without resigning his office. This withdrawal shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the church and in a timely fashion announced to the church.

## **6.8 Loss Of A Plurality Of Elders**

**6.8.1 Temporary Oversight.** This constitution assumes that a plurality of elders oversee the local church. Therefore, if at any period in the life of the church, there no longer exists a plurality of elders, and this lack cannot in a timely way be supplied, the remaining elder (or church, if there is no elder) shall seek the temporary oversight of the pastors of a trusted sister church holding as its doctrinal standard the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689.) The purpose of such an arrangement is to provide both pastoral care and leadership in the recognition of a plurality of elders.

**6.8.1.1** When a suitable eldership willing to undertake these responsibilities is located, the church shall within a reasonable period of time officially place itself under that eldership. If the church has a remaining elder, the aforementioned eldership shall function as his fellow elders. This action shall be taken by a written ballot at a properly called meeting of the church. A three-fourths majority of those

present and voting is necessary for such an action. The recognition of the oversight of such an eldership shall be confirmed (or failing three-fourths majority withdrawn) in the same way at the annual meeting of the church in succeeding years. When a plurality of resident elders is realized, the oversight arrangement described here shall immediately cease.

## **ARTICLE 7 – DISCIPLINE**

**7.1 Introduction.** Every disciple of Christ is disciplined by Him personally and without intervening mediators (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:29-32; 1 Thess. 4:6; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 2:22-23), and mediately, through the church (Matt. 18:15-20; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Every member of the church is accountable to the church and liable to its discipline (1 Cor. 12:12-27; 1 Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Mutual submission to one another (Eph. 5:21) and to the elders whom the Lord has set over His Church (1 Pet. 5:5) are intended by the Lord to result in the sanctification of each individual member and of the whole body of the church collectively.

### **7.2 Formative Discipline**

**7.2.1 General Statement** The church must discipline itself continually by the diligent application of the word preached, by mutual care and exhortation of the members, and by the watchfulness of the elders over the flock.

### **7.3 Corrective Discipline**

**7.3.1 General Statement.** Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly, divisive, immoral, or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. As a general rule and whenever feasible, an effort must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more serious steps are taken (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19-20). The principles given in Matt. 18:15-20, Rom. 16:17-20, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Thess. 3:6-15, 1 Tim. 5:19-22, 6:3-5, and Titus 3:10 must be carefully followed and applied to each case of corrective discipline as appropriate. In some cases, public admonition and/or public repentance may be warranted (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20). In other cases, some of the privileges of membership may need to be suspended and appropriate stricture imposed (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15). In the most extreme cases, excommunication from the membership of the church may be necessary (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-13; 1 Tim. 1:20; Titus 3:10). All the members of the church are obliged to submit to and enforce as appropriate the decision of the church in acts of corrective discipline. Since the church is a spiritual and religious institution, the punishments (2 Cor. 2:6) implemented by the church in corrective discipline are also spiritual. They include public verbal reproof (Matt. 18:17; 1 Tim. 5:20), social avoidance and withdrawal of distinctively Christian fellowship (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:9-11; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14), and removal from the membership of the church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:13). They are intended to effect repentance through a sense of sorrow and shame (2 Cor. 2:7; 2 Thess. 3:14). The church has no right, however, to confiscate goods, revoke conjugal rights, or inflict corporal punishment of any kind. Nevertheless, a member guilty of criminal actions may be delivered to the civil authorities according to the rule of Scripture (Rom. 12:17b; 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet. 4:15). The goals

of corrective discipline are always the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church (1 Cor. 5:6; 1 Tim. 5:20), and the restoration and spiritual growth of the offender (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 1:20).

**7.3.2 Public Reproof Or Censure.** Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort before the gathered church to call an impenitent church member to repentance for sin too serious to be covered with a blanket of love, or to deal with serious sin even where there may have been repentance. The elders may administer public censure whenever, in their judgment, either public misconduct (Gal. 2:11-14; 1 Tim. 5:20), patterns of sin (Titus 1:12-13), or serious doctrinal error (Titus 1:10-13) pose a significant threat to the godliness, unity, or testimony of the congregation. Those who humbly receive the word of public reproof, own and confess their sin, and manifest a transformed life (Prov. 28:13) shall afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance (2 Cor. 7:7-11). If the reproof is not heeded, further discipline may be imposed.

**7.3.3 Suspension Of Privileges.** Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness, and testimony of the church that the Lord requires public reproof to be accompanied with the suspension of some of the privileges of membership according to the nature and gravity of the offense (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). Examples of the suspension of privileges include, but are not limited to, exclusion from the Lord's Supper, from public service in the church, and from meetings where business is conducted. In all cases of suspension the offending person is still regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church. Severe reproof is to be expressed (Matt. 18:17) and the suspension is to be enforced (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:6-15) by the entire church, and not merely by the elders representing the church. Therefore, when appropriate, the elders shall, at a duly convened business meeting of the church, recommend that the offending member be suspended. The elders shall specify the grounds of the discipline, the privileges to be revoked, and the stricture to be imposed. To be valid, an act of suspension must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, the elders shall have the right, at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension upon a member during the brief interval between their determination to recommend suspension and the congregational vote. A member under suspension shall be treated by the congregation according to the specific applications of the general principle of social avoidance (Rom. 16:17-20; 2 Thess. 3:14-15) determined by the elders. Those who humbly submit to the imposed discipline shall afterwards be forgiven, have their privileges restored, and be publicly received back into the full fellowship of the church (Matt. 18:15; 2 Cor. 2:5-11). The general categories of sin which require suspension are as follows:

**7.3.3.1 A Stubborn Private Offender** (Matt. 18:15-17). When a private offense remains unresolved even after the method prescribed by our Lord in Matt. 18:15-16 has been graciously and prayerfully followed, it is considered an aggravated offense. The brethren involved shall bring the matter to the elders, who, if they judge the matter to be serious and cannot persuade the brother to repent, shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the stubborn brother be suspended (Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17). If, even after a period of suspension the person remains

adamant in his sin, excommunication may be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Section 7.3.4. (Matt. 18:17b).

**7.3.3.2 Divisive Teachings Or Behavior** (Rom. 16:17-20; Titus 3:10). When a member deliberately persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to the Scripture or our Confession, or attempts to sow discord among the membership contrary to the Scripture or this constitution, he may be suspended as a factious man. Since every member is responsible to help preserve the unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1ff), no one is to conceal such divisive behavior, but rather to reprove it and disclose it to the elders (Deut. 13:6f; 1 Cor. 1:10, 11). Whenever the elders become aware of such divisive behavior, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (1 Cor. 1:10ff; Titus 3:10). If, even after receiving repeated admonition from the elders, a member persists in such behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the divisive brother be suspended. If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication may be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Section 7.3.4.

**7.3.3.3 Disorderly Behavior** (2 Thess. 3:6-16; 1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14). Some kinds of conduct and doctrine are categorized as disorderly. If a member deliberately persists in conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for the order appointed by God for all mankind in the creation ordinances, namely work and marriage (Gen. 2:1-3, 15, 18-24; Exod. 20:8-11; Matt. 19:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:1-17, 39; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:8; Titus 2:5), he may be suspended as a disorderly man (2 Thess. 3:6). Similarly, a member may be suspended as a disorderly man if he deliberately persists in conduct contrary to the order established by Christ for His Church in Scripture (1 Cor. 11:17-34; 14:37-40; 1 Tim. 3:14, 15) as recognized by our church in this constitution. Whenever the elders become aware that, in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline (1 Thess. 5:14), a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God (2 Thess. 3:14-15). Disorderly conduct is to be distinguished from traitorous conduct. A disorderly member is not immediately to be excommunicated; rather, he is to be suspended in accordance with the directions of 2 Thess. 3:6-15 and not regarded as an enemy but admonished as a brother. However, if even after receiving such admonition from the elders, a member persists in this behavior, the elders shall report the situation to the church and recommend that the disorderly brother be suspended (2 Thess. 3:14-15). If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, excommunication may be enacted according to the procedure outlined in Section 7.3.4.

**7.3.3.4 A Scandalous Sin.** If a member has sinned scandalously but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the elders, excommunication would be unwarranted. However, it may still be prudent to suspend him for a time so that he may realize the gravity of the offense and clearly manifest repentance (Matt. 3:8) so that reproach not be brought upon the Name of Christ and the Church (Isa. 52:5; Ezk. 36:20-21; Rom. 2:24), and so that others may not be emboldened to sin (1 Tim. 5:20). If fruits worthy of repentance are not forthcoming, the elders may recommend

to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Section 7.3.4.

**7.3.3.5 Contempt Of Church Discipline.** If a person is accused or suspected of an offense requiring corrective discipline, yet absents himself from the meetings of the church, or refuses to meet with the elders, or refuses to respond to the inquiries of the elders so that the matter may be investigated, such a person may be suspended (Matt. 18:17; Num. 16:1-12, 23-27). The elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated according to the procedure outlined in Section 7.3.4.

**7.3.4. Excommunication** If an offending member remains impenitent and persists in immoral behavior or heretical belief, the church must remove that person from membership (Matt. 18:15-18).

**7.3.4.1 Occasions Requiring.** In addition to the excommunication of those who have been previously suspended, some expressions of sin (ethical or doctrinal) are so gross and heinous in nature that preliminary actions like public reproof and suspension are inappropriate. In such cases, the guilty member may be immediately excommunicated by the church (1 Cor. 5:1-5). This severe measure is to be employed when both aggravated lawlessness is discovered and there are no hopeful signs of repentance. This severe measure is designed to purge the lawbreaker of his lethal attachment to his sin unto a sincere and enduring repentance (1 Cor. 5:5). The elders, having made earnest but unsuccessful efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation, shall report the same to the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated.

**7.3.4.2 Church Consent In.** All acts of excommunication must be executed by the membership (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4). To be valid, an act of excommunication must have the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting at a duly convened business meeting of the church.

**7.3.4.3 Following Suspension.** Members who have been suspended may be excommunicated if they continue to be impenitent.

**7.3.5 Restoration.** The purposes of church discipline are to restore a fallen brother or sister and to keep the church pure. Therefore, it is the duty of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a suspended or excommunicated member who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance (2 Cor. 2:6-8; Matt. 18:18-20). This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting.

## **ARTICLE 8 – ORDINANCES**

**8.1 General Statement.** There are two ordinances of special significance that our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely baptism and the Lord's Supper. Neither of them has

saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of baptism or through the bread and the cup of the Supper. These ordinances are not means of “special grace”, but they are special “means of grace” and powerful aids to the faith of the believers who participate in them.

## **8.2 Baptism**

**8.2.1 Its Candidates.** Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ who give evidence of true faith are proper candidates for baptism and all such persons should be baptized and joined to the church (Matt. 28:19-21; Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 5:13,14).

**8.2.2 Its Necessity For Membership.** Believing that baptism in water is the God-ordained sign of one’s personal union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and the door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, normally we shall receive into the membership of the church only those who have been baptized as believers “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19).

**8.2.3 Its Mode.** Immersion in water is the biblical mode of baptism. It is necessary for its due administration and is the only mode to be administered by this church.

## **8.3 The Lord’s Supper**

Whereas baptism is the initiatory ordinance by which one enters the visible church, and should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church (1 Cor. 11:26). While this is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity, the bread and the cup of the Supper are and remain only symbols of the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to maintain the purity of this ordinance, the elders will faithfully seek to insure that only true believers are admitted to the table. We believe that the Scriptures reveal a close communion rather than a closed communion (Acts 20:7-12). Therefore, the following individuals will be admitted to the Lord’s Table:

**8.3.1** Members in good standing who are not under the corrective discipline of the church (Sections 5.6.1; 7.3).

**8.3.2** Others who are not under the corrective discipline of any church, who have been approved by the elders, and who understand and affirm PRBC’s view of the Lord’s Supper as revealed in the Scriptures and summarized in chapter 14.1 and chapters 28 and 30 of the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith.

## **ARTICLE 9 – CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS**

**9.1 General Statement.** All congregational meetings shall be called by the elders. There shall be an annual business meeting of the church held near the end of January for the

hearing of reports, the taking of the advisory ballot (Section 6.5.2.1), and the transaction of other business, which the elders bring before the church. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders.

**9.2 Notice Of Meetings.** Notice of all congregational meetings in which business is to be transacted shall be announced at regular services for at least two successive Sundays. Other business meetings at which there is no business transacted by vote may be called at the discretion of the elders without such notice.

**9.3 Quorum.** Fifty percent of the voting membership shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

**9.4 Chairmanship.** The elders shall appoint one from their number to preside at all business meetings.

**9.5 Voting.** All regular and temporary members who have reached the age of eighteen years, except those suspended by the church, shall constitute the voting membership of the church. All voting members should regard their presence at a duly called church meeting with the same seriousness with which they would regard their attendance at a stated service of worship. The elders shall determine whether absentee votes will be permitted on a case-by-case basis as members make known their reason for absence. Unanimity of heart and mind shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when such unanimity is not realized, no less than a two-thirds majority of those voting will make a resolution valid. In other matters wherein the constitution requires a different proportionate vote, this two-thirds figure will be overridden by the express statements of the constitution regarding those categories of business.

## **ARTICLE 10 – CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY**

**10.1 Extent.** The constitution, as with any other non-inspired document, is not infallible. It does, however, reflect an earnest and sincere attempt to apply the Scriptures in ordering the life of this local church. Furthermore, we as members of this church, including the elders, have solemnly committed ourselves to follow this constitution in ordering the life of this church (see the preamble). Therefore, the demands of the ninth commandment, and the sanctity of truth in general, require that the elders and all other members of this church abide by our mutual commitment.

**10.2 Limitations.** Only when we must obey God rather than the provisions of this constitution may its requirements be disregarded (Acts 5:29). If at any time a member of this church becomes aware that adherence to this constitution would violate biblical principle, he should make it known to the elders. If the elders conclude that biblical principle requires disregarding a provision of this constitution, they are obligated to communicate this together with the

reason(s) for their conclusion to the church within one month at a duly called meeting of the church. Furthermore, relevant amendments to this constitution must be submitted to the church and acted upon in accordance with the provisions of Section 10.3 within one year following this informational meeting.

**10.3 Amendments.** Amendments to this constitution may be adopted by a three-fourths majority of members present and voting at a duly convened church meeting. Proposed amendments shall be distributed to the congregation in written form at least two weeks prior to such a meeting.

## **ARTICLE 11 – INCORPORATION IN THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

**11.1 General Statement.** In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," it is necessary that this church be incorporated under the laws of the State of California. All matters related to our corporate identity before the state shall be expressed in the corporation's Articles and By-laws.

## **ARTICLE 12 – DISSOLUTION**

**12.1 General Statement.** No donor, member, officer of the church, or private individual shall be entitled to share in the distribution of any assets of the church upon dissolution. Any assets shall be given only to another church of like faith and practice, which must subscribe to the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689.