

Epsom Bible Church

Constitution

And

By-laws

March 17, 2019

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**EPSOM BIBLE CHURCH
398 Black Hall Road
Epsom, New Hampshire 03234**

CONSTITUTION

PREAMBLE

We, the members of Epsom Bible Church in Epsom, New Hampshire, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves. The articles of this Constitution shall serve as the By-laws of this church incorporated under the laws of the State of New Hampshire.

MISSION STATEMENT

The supreme mission of Epsom Bible Church, and so also of every individual believer, is to glorify God and to serve Him forever (Romans 11:36; Ephesians 3:21; I Peter 4:11). To that end, in keeping with the spirit of Colossians 1:28 (“We proclaim Him [*Jesus Christ*], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ.”), it is our commitment to develop and equip a community of believers to worship Jesus Christ as Lord; to proclaim Him as Savior to a lost world; to pursue holiness in order to please Him; to love and serve Him with heart, soul, and mind; and to manifest His love to others both within the church as well as the greater community.

ARTICLE I: NAME

The name of this church is Epsom Bible Church.

ARTICLE II: PURPOSE OF THIS CONSTITUTION

SECTION 1. Declaration of Purpose.

This written document is a declaration of our beliefs and understanding of the Holy Scriptures, as to our doctrinal beliefs, form of church government, organizational structure, and purposes as a body of believers. It is vitally important for a church, if it is to glorify God and accomplish His purposes, that its people be in agreement with regard to doctrine, organizational structure and goals (I Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3, 13).

This document is designed to promote a oneness of mind within this church body, and that those interested in becoming a part of this ministry might have a clear concept of our beliefs and objectives.

This document is not a higher authority than the Word of God. Neither is it a higher authority than the authority that God Himself has invested in those believers He has appointed to lead in this local church (Ephesians 4:11-16). It must be remembered that the local church itself is a living, growing, and

flexible body subject ultimately to the authority of Jesus Christ alone as it is declared in the Word of God (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18). As we grow in the Word, this document is therefore subject to amendment according to the provisions of Article XIII: Amendments. This document is, however, to be followed in all its parts as a protection to all until part or all is amended according to its provisions.

SECTION 2. Interpretation of the Constitution.

Any interpretation of this Constitution and By-laws is subject to the judgment of the Epsom Bible Church Council of Elders based upon a thorough examination of the Scriptures.

ARTICLE III: DOCTRINE

Since the Word of God is foundational and absolutely essential to true spirituality, fellowship, spiritual sustenance, effectiveness in service and ministry, faith and doctrinal accuracy, we believe that the most important function of this local church, and its central thrust, is the consistent teaching and study of the Word of God (I Timothy 4:6-7).

The study of the Word of God is not an end in itself, but it is a high priority and a necessary channel for fellowship with God and thereby also of effective ministry to one another and to the world. It will not therefore, be bypassed or made secondary in the interest of social concerns, actions, or activities, but must be so promoted that the Word, and the teaching of the Word, become the pulse and heartbeat behind all church and non-church related activities or concerns (Psalm 119:1ff; 138:2; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; I Thessalonians 2:13; I Timothy 1:3-5; 4:1-16; II Timothy 3:14-17; 4:1-4).

This local church shall thus function as an independent, evangelical Bible church, committed to the fundamental, historic truths recorded in God's inerrant revelation—the Holy Scriptures. Therefore, to serve within Epsom Bible Church, all elders, deacons, deaconesses, ministry staff, ministry volunteers, and teachers must willingly submit to and teach no beliefs other than those contained in the Doctrinal Statement (Article IV) of this church.

ARTICLE IV: DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

(1) WE BELIEVE in and teach the Holy Scriptures; accepting fully the writings of the Old and New Testaments as the inerrant Word of God, verbally inspired in all parts and therefore altogether sufficient as our only infallible and authoritative rule of faith and practice (Psalm 119:160; Proverbs 30:5a; II Timothy 3:16-17; II Peter 1:19-21). We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture which affirms the belief that the opening chapters of Genesis present creation in six literal days (Genesis 1:31; Exodus 31:17).

(2) WE BELIEVE in and teach that there is only one true God Who is an intelligent, sovereign, spiritual and personal being; perfect, infinite, and eternal in His being, holiness and love, wisdom and power; absolutely separate from and above the world as its Creator, yet all things take place in His presence as the Upholder of all things. He is revealed to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, three distinct persons but without any division of nature, being, or essence, and each having a distinct ministry in God's relation to His creation and people (Genesis 1:1; Exodus 15:11; Psalm 83:18; 139:7-9; Matthew 28:19; John 10:30; 15:26).

(3) WE BELIEVE in and teach that the Lord Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Triune God, Eternal Word, and Only Begotten Son; that without any change in His Divine Person, He became man by the miracle of the Virgin Birth, thus to continue forever as both true God and true man, one person with two natures; that as a man, He was tempted as we are, yet was without sin; that as the perfect Lamb of God, He gave Himself in death upon the cross, bearing there the sin of the entire world, and suffering its full penalty of divine wrath in our stead; that He arose from the grave in a glorified body as our Great High Priest; and that He ascended into heaven, there to appear before the face of God as our Advocate and our Intercessor (Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1, 14; 3:16; I Corinthians 15:3-8; Galatians 4:4-5; Philippians 2:6-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; I John 2:1-2).

(4) WE BELIEVE in and teach that the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, and a divine agent in nature, revelation, and redemption; that He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment; and that He regenerates, indwells, baptizes, seals, and anoints all who become children of God; that He empowers, guides, teaches, sanctifies and fills the believers who daily surrender to Him (John 3:5-6; 14:16-17; 16:7-15; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 12:13; II Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 1:13-14; 5:18). The Holy Spirit distributes spiritual gifts to the church as He chooses (I Corinthians 12:4-11); that some gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and miraculous healings were given to be used as signs to authenticate the message of the first century Church, and are not normative today; that speaking in tongues was never the common or necessary sign of the baptism nor of the filling of the Spirit, and that the complete deliverance of the body from sickness or death awaits the consummation of our salvation in the resurrection (Acts 4:8, 31; Romans 8:23; I Corinthians 13:8; II Corinthians 12:12); that in accordance with the sovereign will of God, healing is available through the prayer of believers (James 5:14).

(5) WE BELIEVE and teach that all men are by nature and choice sinful and eternally lost; that man was a direct creation of God, made in His image and likeness; that by personal disobedience to the revealed will of God, man became a sinful creature in both nature and practice, thus alienated from the life and family of God, under the righteous wrath and judgment of God, and has within himself no possible means of salvation (Genesis 1:27; 3:6-7; Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10-23; 5:12, 19; Galatians 3:10-11).

(6) WE BELIEVE and teach that true saving faith encompasses both faith and repentance and that both elements of conversion are the gift of God (Luke 24:46-47; Acts 11:18; 20:20-21; Ephesians 2:8-9), and determined by His sovereign predestination (Ephesians 1:3-6). Salvation is the free gift of God, neither merited nor secured in part or in whole by any work of man, but it is received only by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Christ that all true believers have as a present possession the gift of eternal life, a perfect righteousness, sonship in the family of God, deliverance and security from all condemnation, every spiritual resource needed for life and godliness (Romans 8:1-2; Ephesians 1:3-14; II Peter 1:3-4). True believers have the divine guarantee that they shall never perish; that this salvation effects the entire life of the believer, and that apart from the Lord Jesus Christ alone, there is no possible salvation (John 1:12-13; 3:14-18; 10:28-29; Acts 4:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; Philippians 1:6; Titus 3:5; I Peter 1:3-5).

(7) WE BELIEVE and teach righteous living and godly works: not as a means to attain salvation in any sense, but as the proper evidence and fruits of salvation; and therefore as Christians, we should obey the Word of our Lord, seek the things that are above, walk as He walked, accept as our solemn responsibility the duty and privileges of bearing the gospel to a lost world, remembering that a

victorious Christian life is possible only for those who, in gratitude for the infinite and undeserved mercies of God, have presented themselves as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-10; 4:22-24; Philippians 2:12-16).

(8) WE BELIEVE in and teach the existence of Satan who originally was created as holy and perfect, but through pride and wicked ambition rebelled against God, thus becoming utterly depraved in character, the great adversary of God and His people, leader of all other evil angels, the deceiver and god of this world; that his powers are vast, but strictly limited to the permissive will of God who overrules all of his wicked devices for good; that he was defeated and judged at the cross, and therefore his final doom is certain; that we are able to resist and overcome him only in the armor of God, by the blood of the Lamb and the power of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ephesians 2:1-7; 6:10-18; James 4:7; I Peter 5:8-9; I John 3:8; Revelation 12:8-11; 20:10).

(9) WE BELIEVE and teach the imminent return of Christ: that He will bodily return to the clouds to rapture his Church which is the blessed hope (I Corinthians 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:13-17; Titus 2:13); that following the rapture there will be seven years of tribulation on the earth culminating with the Great Tribulation and His second coming to earth to establish His glorious and literal kingdom over all the nations for a thousand years, at the end of which He will hand the kingdom to the Father and we will enter the Eternal State (I Corinthians 15:24, 50-54; II Thessalonians 2:1-4; Hebrews 10:37; James 5:8; Jude 14-15; Revelation 19:11-16; 20:1 – 22:7).

(10) WE BELIEVE in and teach the future life, bodily resurrection, and eternal judgment: that the spirits of the saved at death go immediately to be with Christ in Heaven, that their works shall be brought before the Judgment Seat of Christ for the determination of reward, which will take place at the time when Christ will come for His own; that the spirits of the unsaved at death descend immediately into Hades where they are kept under punishment until the final day of judgment, at which time their bodies shall be raised from the grave, that they be judged and cast into the Lake of Fire, the place of final and everlasting punishment (Luke 16:19-31; I Corinthians 15:12-58; II Corinthians 5:8-10; Revelation 20:11ff).

(11) WE BELIEVE and teach the Lordship of Jesus Christ: that He alone is the Head of the Body of Christ, into which all believers are immediately baptized by the Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation; that all members of this one Spiritual Body should assemble and identify themselves in local churches (Acts 16:31; I Corinthians 12:13; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:11-15; Philippians 2:9-11).

(12) WE BELIEVE and teach the importance of the local church: that a New Testament church is a local assembly of born again believers who have undergone believer's baptism, united in organization to practice New Testament ordinances, to meet together for worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching, and a united testimony, and to engage actively in carrying out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 2:41-42; Ephesians 4:11-14; Hebrews 10:24-25).

(13) WE BELIEVE and teach the independence and autonomy of the local church: that each New Testament church is free to govern itself without ecclesiastical interference and should cooperate with other New Testament local churches as the Holy Spirit leads; that it is responsible to follow the pattern of the New Testament church and is directly accountable to God (Matthew 16:18; 18:17; Acts 6:1-5; 15:22-23; I Timothy 3:14-15).

(14) WE BELIEVE and teach that the two ordinances given to the Local Church are baptism and the

Lord's Supper: that baptism is by immersion of believers in water, thus portraying the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ; that the Lord's Supper is the partaking of the bread and cup by the believer as a continuing memorial of the body and shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 26: 26-30; 28:19-20; Acts 2:41; 8:38-39; I Corinthians 11:23-32).

(15) WE BELIEVE God's plan for human sexuality is to be expressed only within the context of marriage, that God created man and woman as unique biological persons made to complete each other. God instituted monogamous marriage between male and female as the foundation of the family and the basic structure of human society. For this reason, we believe that marriage is exclusively the union of one genetic male and one genetic female. Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:6-9; Romans 1:26-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9.

BY-LAWS

ARTICLE V: GOVERNMENT

SECTION 1. Church Government.

The government of this church, under the headship of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is invested in the body of believers who compose the membership of Epsom Bible Church (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:16; 5:21; Colossians 1:18; 2:19).

SECTION 2. Executive Authority.

Executive authority or leadership, however, is invested by the membership, as authorized by Scripture, in a Council of Elders who lead the church and to whom the congregation is to submit under the headship of Christ. These men have the authority and responsibility to carry out the business or ministry of the church in spiritual and physical (material) matters for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry (Acts 15:6; 20:28; Ephesians 4:11-12; Philippians 1:1; I Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

SECTION 3. Delegation of Authority.

The Epsom Bible Church Council of Elders, hereafter referred to as the "Council of Elders" or simply "The Council", has the authority to create and dissolve any committees and positions to which it may delegate any specified aspect of its responsibility. The Council of Elders also has the authority to appoint elders, deacons or other members of the church to serve as members of such committees and to act as its agents in such positions. Every committee shall have an elder or deacon, responsible for the overall operation of the committee, whom the Council of Elders shall appoint. These committees shall exist for the specific time period so directed by the Council of Elders. These committees shall perform tasks solely in accordance with the duties and with powers specifically delegated by the Council. The general functions of the committees will be to bring considered recommendations to the Council concerning ministries, to provide a wider base of counsel to the elders in their general oversight of specific ministries, or to accomplish specific designed tasks.

SECTION 4. Definitions.

The terms “congregation”, “body”, “flock” and “fellowship” are synonymous terms which, as used in this document, are defined as the entire group of believers who regularly attend and participate in the various ministries of Epsom Bible Church. It is understood that individuals within this larger group may or may not be official members of Epsom Bible Church as described in Article VIII: Membership. The term “membership”, as used in this document, is defined as that group of believers within the congregation of Epsom Bible Church who are official members of Epsom Bible Church as described in Article VIII: Membership.

ARTICLE VI: ELDERS

SECTION 1. Qualifications.

The Council of Elders shall be comprised of men who are members in good standing of Epsom Bible Church and who possess those qualifications described in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. Specifically, an elder must be:

- A. Blameless as a steward of God; above reproach (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6-7)
- B. A husband of one wife; a one-woman man (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)
- C. Temperate, sober, vigilant (I Timothy 3:2)
- D. Sober-minded, prudent (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)
- E. Of good behavior; orderly, respectable (I Timothy 3:2)
- F. Given to hospitality (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:8)
- G. Apt to teach; able to teach; be able to exhort believers and refute false teaching (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9)
- H. Not given to wine (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- I. Not violent; not pugnacious (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- J. Patient, moderate, forbearing, gentle (I Timothy 3:3)
- K. Not a brawler; uncontentious; not soon angry or quick-tempered (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- L. Not covetous; not a lover of money; not greedy of base gain (I Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7)
- M. One who rules well his own house; his children are faithful, not accused of rebellion to God (I Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6)
- N. Not a novice; not a new convert (I Timothy 3:6)

- O. One who has a good report or reputation with outsiders (I Timothy 3:7)
- P. Not self-willed (Titus 1:7)
- Q. A lover of good men and things (Titus 1:8)
- R. Just, fair (Titus 1:8)
- S. Holy, devout (Titus 1:8)
- T. Self-controlled (Titus 1:8)

SECTION 2. Authority.

A. The ministry of Epsom Bible Church shall be under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ working in and through the Council of Elders. The elders will be the primary decision-making body within the church. However, it is critical that the elders make decisions based on carefully assembled facts, Scriptural insight, the individual and corporate leading of the Holy Spirit, and input from the membership (Acts 6:5; 15:6, 22; I Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

B. The church is not a democracy or a government where the majority rules. Jesus Christ Himself is the Head and Ruler of the church. However, as seen in Article V, the Lord Jesus leads and directs through both the membership and the elders. Since the Lord Jesus dwells in each member of the Body of Christ, and as so leads and directs through the body as to needs, desires, and responsibilities for each local body, it is important and necessary for the elders to seek input, information and guidance from the membership, especially on practical matters of church life. As a result of these Biblical facts, in regard to certain major decisions of church life, the membership may be called upon by the Council to vote on these matters in order to show a unified movement toward the direction in question and to show a sense of God's leading. If the result of such a vote does not show a substantial unanimity within the membership with regard to the matter in question, the elders shall seek prayerful discernment from the Lord with regard to the appropriate direction for the ministry. Examples of these major decisions may include, but are not limited to, the undertaking of a significant financial transaction and the appointment of staff elders.

SECTION 3. Duties.

Because of the external and internal Christian testimony that is to be promoted within the local church, an elder's chief priorities shall be exercising a personal spiritual walk which promotes self examination, maintaining a servant-like quality in life, and serving with gentleness and humility in all that he does. Out of his Biblical perspective, the elder is to joyfully undertake the following duties in order to equip the saints:

- A. Give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).
- B. Guard and protect the flock (Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2).

- C. Oversee and provide spiritual direction for the activities and growth of the local church (Hebrews 13: 7, 17).
- D. Aid in finding and developing gifted teachers of the Word (II Timothy 2:2).
- E. Warn and discipline as outlined in Article IX: Discipline.
- F. Support, encourage, counsel and lead in humility (I Peter 5:2-3).
- G. See to the appointment of deacons and deaconesses as per Article VII: Deacons/Deaconesses.
- H. Provide guidance to the deacons/deaconesses as needed.
- I. See to the oversight of the finances of the local church per Article X: Church Finances.
- J. Pray for and encourage the sick (James 5:14-15).
- K. Seek the Lord's will to interpret the Articles and provisions of this Constitution and By-laws in the light of Scripture.
- L. Make decisions and perform any other duties as situations within the church dictate, either directly or through proper and orderly delegation of committees or persons as necessary.
- M. The elders shall strive to maintain open communication with the congregation, both to discern needs, concerns and viewpoints, and to communicate information and decisions. This may be done through the Sunday bulletin, pulpit announcements, website, group or membership meetings and discussions, votes, and one-on-one personal contact (Acts 6:1-5; 11:22; 15:1, 6, 22; 16:2).
- N. The Council of Elders shall recognize, interview, and investigate candidates for elder and deacon/deaconess positions. The Council shall provide for individual members of the church either to nominate candidates or to present themselves to the Council as candidates for office and for the Council's further investigation. In no instance shall any individual be considered a nominee for the office without the nominee's consent. In those cases where the Council of Elders concludes that a nominee is not qualified for office, they shall so inform the nominee stating the reasons for this conclusion.
- O. The Council of Elders shall conduct informational meetings at least once per year to report on the direction and status of the ministry.

SECTION 4. Organization.

- A. The Council of Elders shall always be composed of a plurality of men. The total number of elders on the Council at any time shall be determined by the needs of the ministry and by the call and qualification of men in the church.
- B. The Council of Elders shall always be composed of both staff elders and non-staff elders

with the number of non-staff elders always exceeding the number of staff elders by at least one. Each member of the Council of Elders shall have an equal vote in all Council decisions.

C. The Council of Elders shall organize itself however it determines to best achieve the mission of the church. The elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function.

D. The Council shall meet regularly, or as necessary if circumstances dictate. Unless the Council provides otherwise, meetings of the Council may be held immediately upon notice. A quorum of elders must be present in order for any decision made by the Council to be binding. A quorum is defined as at least a majority of the then currently serving elders. When practical and if possible, elders who were absent from any meeting shall be consulted prior to the implementation of any binding decisions made by the Council.

E. Decisions by the Council of Elders that pertain directly to any of the elders themselves (such as church discipline or salary review, etc.), should be made without the participation of the elder in question (except when information is required of him by the other elders), in the discussions or the final decision of the elders.

F. Decisions shall be reached by the Council of Elders after prayerful consideration and only by the unanimous vote of the Council, in a spirit of humility, with each elder thereby regarding others before himself. Therefore, after all discussions concerning a matter are terminated and a binding decision has been made, the Council must have a spirit of unanimity as to the direction of the church.

G. The priorities of discussion and action at elder meetings shall comply with the following:

- (1) Prayer/Worship: the shepherding and accountability roles of the elders over the flock (cf., Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:2-3).
- (2) Management of church affairs: decisions regarding finances, administration and policies effecting the direction of the ministry (cf., I Timothy 3:5).
- (3) Decisions and applications of church discipline: church discipline is to be administered by the Council of Elders when necessary (cf., Hebrews 13:17) in accordance with Article IX: Discipline.
- (4) Doctrinal decisions regarding church policy and ministry methodology: periodic discussions regarding the ministry and how to be Biblical and effective in the task God has called us to do.

SECTION 5. Appointment.

The Scriptures emphasize that elders in the church are not appointed by men, but by God (Acts 20:28). The task of the people in the church then, should be to seek and discover God's direction and leading within the church membership in the appointment of elders.

The need for an additional elder, staff or non-staff, may be recognized by either the elders or other members of the church. The elders, in consultation with or in response to the request of the church

members, shall seek to discern the nature of the need and to follow God's leading in deciding if the need justifies the appointment of an elder. Upon a decision by the Council of Elders that a need does exist, the church will prayerfully and carefully seek God's direction in choosing the right man or men.

It is the purpose of Epsom Bible Church to base the selection process upon an orderly and proper sequence of events which will most easily facilitate the recognition of God's appointment of men to this ministry. The whole membership should be on the alert for men whose lives characterize the qualifications laid out in Scripture. Only qualified men will be appointed. If no qualified men are available, or if men are unwilling to serve who would otherwise be qualified, no appointment will be made. The church should wait on the Lord either to remove the need or to provide qualified men.

The Scriptures speak of two categories of elders within a church body: non-paid elders (identified in this document as non-staff elders) and paid elders (identified in this document as staff elders) (I Timothy 5:17-18). The following procedures outline the steps necessary to appoint elders:

A. Non-staff Elders. The following steps will be the process by which an individual will be screened and evaluated in terms of discerning God's hand upon that person's life, in qualifying him as a non-staff elder:

(1) Calling: The individual responds to God's working in his life by expressing a desire to serve as an elder.

(2) Consultation: The individual shall be carefully examined by the Council of Elders as to his qualifications and support of both the doctrine and practice of Epsom Bible Church. The Council of Elders and the individual shall meet together to discuss the Biblical qualifications for service, agreement with the doctrine and Constitution and By-laws of Epsom Bible Church, expectations of the ministry, and other areas that may be deemed pertinent and beneficial by either the elders or the individual.

(3) Confirmation: The Council of Elders must unanimously agree that the individual has the potential for leadership and thereby assume responsibility to work with the individual toward that end.

(4) Presentation: If the individual's life and service is deemed to be appropriate by the Council of Elders, the person will be presented to the entire church for evaluation, examination, and affirmation as one whom God has qualified for leadership. The entire membership will be given an appropriate period of time in which to personally express to the Council of Elders any concerns or other necessary information with regard to the individual.

(5) Affirmation: After the Council of Elders have acted upon any concerns or information expressed by the membership with regard to the individual, and if the elders are in unanimous agreement that the individual has indeed been qualified by an act of the grace of God for leadership within the church, then the elders will affirm what God has already done in the man's life by setting him apart as an elder.

B. Staff Elders.

(1) Definition: Staff elders are men who, in response to God's call, are devoting their vocational lives to the ministry of the Word and prayer in the service of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Staff elders are supported financially by the church so that they may give their full attention to their vocational ministry.

(2) Calling: The church's call of a staff elder is a call to the eldership of the church. Therefore, staff elders shall be members of the Council of Elders and must possess all of the Biblical qualifications of an elder.

(3) Duties: In addition to the duties of an elder as described in Section 3 above, staff elders shall perform additional duties as determined by the Council of Elders. These additional duties shall be in writing at the time of the call to service, and any subsequent change in these duties must be approved by the Council of Elders.

(4) Selection and Call: The Council of Elders shall have the responsibility of hiring and terminating staff elders. However, the Council of Elders may seek an affirmation of these decisions from the membership in accordance with Article VI, Section 2(B): [*Elders'*] Authority and Article VIII, Section 5: Voting and Member Meetings.

SECTION 6. Termination.

A. Voluntary Resignation. An elder may step down at any time he so chooses. The Elder should prayerfully reflect on his decision and seek advice from the Council before making a final decision.

B. Involuntary Dismissal. Involuntary dismissal of any elder, staff or non-staff, will be a disciplinary action of the church membership in accordance with the instruction of Matthew 18:15-18; Galatians 6:1 and I Timothy 5:19-20. The specific procedures for this are detailed in Article IX: Discipline.

ARTICLE VII: DEACONS/DEACONESSES

SECTION 1. Qualifications.

Deacons (men) and deaconesses (women) shall be those who desire to be servants of the church body, are able to serve, meet all the qualifications of Scripture, and are conscientiously and wholeheartedly in agreement with the Constitution and By-laws of this church.

A. Deacons. Those who serve as deacons shall be men who are members in good standing of Epsom Bible Church and who possess the Scriptural qualifications set forth in I Timothy 3:8-12. Specifically, a deacon must be:

1. A man of dignity (I Timothy 3:8)
2. Not double-tongued (I Timothy 3:8)

3. Not addicted to much wine (I Timothy 3:8)
4. Not fond of sordid gain (I Timothy 3:8)
5. A man who holds the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience (I Timothy 3:9)
6. Tested (I Timothy 3:10)
7. A husband of only one wife (I Timothy 3:12)
8. A good manager of his children and his own household (I Timothy 3:12)

B. Deaconesses. Those who serve as deaconesses shall be women who are members in good standing of Epsom Bible Church and who possess the Scriptural qualities set forth in I Timothy 3:11 and Titus 2:3-5. Specifically, a deaconess must be:

1. Dignified (I Timothy 3:11)
2. Not a gossip (I Timothy 3:11; Titus 2:3)
3. Temperate (I Timothy 3:11)
4. Faithful (I Timothy 3:11)
5. Reverent in her behavior (Titus 2:3)
6. Not enslaved to much wine (Titus 2:3)
7. One who teaches what is good, so that she may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored (Titus 2:3-5)

SECTION 2. Duties.

The deacons/deaconesses shall advise and be ready to assist the elders in ministering to the needs of the body and in supporting the various ministries of the church. Their specific duties will be designated by the elders according to the needs of the church and a deacon's/deaconess' particular gifts, capacities and talents. Specific responsibilities may include:

- A. Administering the ministries of the church under elder oversight;
- B. The greeting and welcoming ministries of the church;
- C. Assisting in administering the ordinances of the Gospel;
- D. Assisting at fellowship gatherings of the church;

E. Caring for and maintaining church properties and assets;

F. Assisting the poor and needy and otherwise providing aid in times of crisis or distress.

SECTION 3. Organization.

The deacons/deaconesses, in consultation with the elders, shall serve in a manner that best achieves the administration of their specific responsibilities as well as the mission of the church.

SECTION 4. Appointment.

I Timothy 3:10 teaches that potential deacons are to be tested. The primary means of testing is time; time for the membership to evaluate an individual's commitment to the Lord, their qualifications according to I Timothy 3:8-12 and Titus 2:3-5, their doctrinal understanding and their willingness to serve the local church. The membership and the Council of Elders should be on the alert to those men and women who demonstrate the qualifications of a deacon or deaconess.

Deacons/deaconesses will be appointed as the need arises. However, only qualified and willing individuals will be appointed. If no qualified individuals are available, or if those qualified are unable or unwilling to serve, no appointment will be made. The church shall wait on the Lord to provide a qualified individual(s) to meet the need.

The following outlines the procedure Epsom Bible Church will follow in selecting deacons/deaconesses:

A. The Council of Elders shall decide if the need for a deacon(s)/deaconess(es) exists.

B. When there is a need, the Council shall notify the membership of the need and ask them to recommend men or women whom they believe meet the qualifications of a deacon or deaconess.

C. The Council of Elders will review the names submitted to them by the membership along with any additional names of individuals they believe to be qualified.

D. Each name submitted will be carefully and prayerfully considered and reviewed according to their qualifications, gifts, the need, and the individual's willingness to serve.

E. The elders will then appoint that individual(s) whom they believe to be the most qualified to serve according to the specific needs and qualifications.

SECTION 5. Termination.

A. Deacons/deaconesses shall be appointed to serve as long as they are qualified and willing to serve and as long as a need for their ministry exists.

B. Voluntary Resignation. A deacon/deaconess may voluntarily resign from their position at any time they so choose. The deacon/deaconess should prayerfully reflect on their decision and

seek advice from the Council of Elders before making a final decision.

C. Involuntary Dismissal. Involuntary dismissal of a deacon/deaconess shall be in accordance with the procedures for church discipline outlined in Article IX: Discipline. If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from serving, the Council may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If the individual refuses to resign, the Council may remove the individual from serving, but only after the principles for church discipline have been prayerfully considered and followed (Matthew 18:15-18).

ARTICLE VIII: MEMBERSHIP

SECTION 1. General Statement.

Scripture teaches that there are to be local assemblies of believers, united together by a common faith, by union in Christ, and the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by common purposes, commitments and responsibilities, and with a common leadership of that specific body, independent in government from other local assemblies (I Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 4:4-6; I Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17; I Peter 5:1-3). The local church is to be a body of people allotted to the charge of elders in order to be equipped to do the work of the ministry (I Corinthians 12:20-27; Ephesians 4:11-13; I Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:24-25; I Peter 4:8-10; 5:1-3), and subject to the discipline of that body (I Corinthians 5:2; I Thessalonians 5:14-15; II Thessalonians 3:6, 14; I Timothy 5:19-20,). Conversely, believers in isolation, who are operating independently of other believers of a local assembly, are living in a manner that is contrary to Scripture (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Membership to a local body of believers involves more than just a casual affiliation, but rather involves a tie, an involvement, a commitment, a responsibility to love the brethren and a submission to both the leadership and to the other members of that local body. The emphasis of Scripture is that every believer become identified and committed to a specific local assembly of believers following the leading and direction of God (Acts 2:42-47; Romans 16:1-2; I Corinthians 16:10; II Corinthians 8:16-24). Believers are also to devote themselves to a local assembly and its leadership for teaching, leadership, fellowship and worship (Acts 2:42). This commitment is revealed by their attitude, faith, attendance, involvement, giving and submission to that assembly.

An individual's decision to become an official member of Epsom Bible Church should flow from their commitment and willingness to submit to the church and to minister within it.

SECTION 2. Membership Requirement for Ministry.

No individual who is 18 years of age or older shall serve in any sanctioned ministry of Epsom Bible Church unless that individual has first been accepted as an official member of Epsom Bible Church. Individuals under the age of 18 shall be allowed to serve in Epsom Bible Church as long as they are under the oversight of an elder, deacon or deaconess.

SECTION 3. Procedure for Membership.

An individual 18 years of age or older who confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior, who has received believers' baptism by immersion and who has agreed to uphold this Constitution and By-laws

is qualified and eligible for membership in Epsom Bible Church. Anyone who desires to become a member should contact one of the elders and request membership. At least two members of the Council of Elders shall meet with the individual to discuss the individual's request after which a recommendation will be made to the remainder of the Council. If the individual meets all of the qualifications necessary for membership, he/she will be accepted into the membership of Epsom Bible Church by the Council of Elders. This decision will be acknowledged before the congregation at a subsequent church worship service.

SECTION 4. Membership Status.

The elders will review the membership roll annually. Members may be removed from the roll by the member's choice, by church discipline (Article IX: Discipline), or by non-involvement with Epsom Bible Church. If an individual appears to be no longer involved with the church, an elder(s) will attempt to meet with the person to verify their membership status. No individual will be removed from membership without first an elder making a conscientious attempt at contacting the individual. Members of the church who are at the final stage of church discipline will be removed immediately from membership at the time of the discipline.

SECTION 5. Voting and Member Meetings.

The purpose of voting is not to simply obtain a "majority-rules" consensus. Rather, all voting in this church is designed to show God's leading within the membership on an issue. Unless specifically indicated otherwise within this Constitution and By-laws, an 80% majority vote in favor of an issue shall signify to the church leadership that the membership agrees that God is leading favorably in the decision being voted on. If an 80% majority vote in favor of a particular matter is not achieved, the Council will take no further steps with regard to the matter until the elders have prayerfully reflected upon and re-evaluated all of the relevant facts which pertain to the issue under consideration.

Only active members in good standing who are present at an official membership meeting of the church may vote. The means of voting will normally be by a show of hands. This may vary, however, if the leadership announces the form of voting to be used when the meeting of the vote is announced. A request for vote by written ballot may be made by the membership. A vote by written ballot will occur if it is supported by at least 51% of the eligible voting members present at a membership meeting. The membership will be advised of the date and time of a meeting for a vote at least two weeks prior to the meeting.

At least 50% of the church membership must be present at a membership meeting to make the results of a particular vote binding.

ARTICLE IX: DISCIPLINE

The discipline of individuals within the body shall be a responsibility of the Council of Elders under the procedures established on the basis of Scripture. All such proceedings shall be guided by a spirit of prayer mingled with Christian gentleness, forbearance, humility and holy firmness under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

SECTION 1. General Policy.

A. All members of the Body of Christ have an individual responsibility to live righteously and to encourage righteous behavior in other believers. Interpersonal accountability is a Christian obligation that extends beyond the membership of the local church. As Galatians 6:1-5 instructs, this process begins with self-examination and a spirit of humility sensitive to one's own faults. Believers are instructed to be aware of their own sins, to be penitent and to be quick to seek reconciliation with offended individuals (Matthew 5:23-25; 7:1-5). It is recognized that Epsom Bible Church members have a special relationship one to the other. Consequently, Epsom Bible Church members have the privilege of experiencing the full expression of love and care for the local body as outlined in Scripture and as detailed below.

B. Church discipline is regarded as a serious and clear directive in Scripture. Church discipline is intended to restore an erring individual (II Corinthians 2:5-8), to purify the Church (I Corinthians 5:6-8), to warn other individuals about the dangers of sinful behavior or teaching (Deuteronomy 19:20; Acts 5:11; II Corinthians 7:11) and to demonstrate the reality of righteous living to the unsaved world (Ephesians 4:22-24). Discipline is exercised with compassion for the erring individual and a sincere desire to seek that person's repentance, reconciliation and if necessary, restoration to the fellowship of the local church (Matthew 18:12-14).

C. Discipline does not entitle the elders to abuse their authority over the church body (I Peter 5:1-3). Specific guidelines are followed that identify the grounds for church discipline and the process of such discipline. See Article IX, Section 3: Procedures in Membership Accountability.

D. The individuals within Epsom Bible Church belong to a spiritual body of local believers who identify with a common purpose and mission. There is a mutual accountability that each individual believer is to practice in order to encourage and provoke holy living (Hebrews 10:23-25). Church discipline begins with individual accountability that is a responsibility of every believer. The body is encouraged to take this responsibility seriously.

E. Scripture is clear that the motives of the believer(s) or the elders dealing with the erring individual must be pure before our Savior, His Church, and the world.

- (1) They are to avoid vengeance and arrogant presumption (Galatians 6:1).
- (2) They are not to be motivated by hostility or anger but by a loving concern for the erring individual (II Thessalonians 3:15).
- (3) They are to approach the erring individual with heart-felt sorrow and sincere concern (I Corinthians 5:2; II Corinthians 2:4).
- (4) They are to be ready to grant restoration to the erring individual when repentance occurs (Luke 17:1-10; II Corinthians 2:5-8).

SECTION 2. Offenses Applicable to Church Discipline.

Individual accountability is an on-going expression of believers and is always the first step in dealing

with an erring individual. No person is above or immune from accountability (I Timothy 5:19-22). Church discipline is not God's method for making the church sinless. Scripture defines certain deviations from the truth as grounds for formal disciplinary action. Sin that damages the church, weakens its testimony or promotes disunity constitutes an offense that necessitates formal disciplinary action. These sins are primarily understood to include, but are not limited to, the following categories:

A. False teaching constitutes a deliberate, persistent program of teaching that intentionally rejects the foundational doctrines of Scripture (Titus 3:10; Revelation 2:14).

B. Apostasy constitutes a public denial of the essential truths of God's Word (i.e. a belief in the inspired Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the final authority for belief and behavior; a belief in the Trinity; a belief in the complete humanity and the complete deity of Christ; a belief in the utter sinfulness of all humanity; a belief in the virgin conception of Christ and His incarnation as the eternal Son of God; a belief in Christ's substitutionary atonement as the only way of salvation; a belief in the bodily resurrection and return of Christ; a belief in salvation by God's grace alone through faith in Christ alone; a belief in the eternal damnation of the lost and the eternal glorification of the saved). These essential truths are reflected in Article IV: Doctrinal Statement of this Constitution and By-laws (Galatians 2:11-14; I John 2:19).

C. Divisiveness constitutes behavior that undermines the unity of Epsom Bible Church either between individuals or against God's established authority in the church (Philippians 4:2-3; I Thessalonians 5:14).

D. Immorality is constituted Scripturally as behavior that is deemed immoral and brings shame on the testimony of Christ and the local church (I Corinthians 5:11; 6:9-11). This category includes sexual immorality and sexual deviancy (I Thessalonians 4:3-8). While sexual behavior may or may not be known publicly, these sins internally pollute the church and disrupt its mission. Scripture denounces sexual impurity. These sins include adultery, homosexuality, and every other kind of sexual deviancy or impurity that Scripture calls fornication (porneia). This behavior will not be tolerated within the body of Epsom Bible Church (Romans 1:26-27).

SECTION 3. Procedures in Membership Accountability.

Church discipline is to be handled prayerfully, carefully, and justly. Below are the steps of accountability and discipline that follow the guidelines given in Matthew 18:15-20.

A. First Step: Arrange a private meeting with the offender. Humbly confront the person with the nature of the offense. If the person repents, the matter is closed (Matthew 18:15; Luke 17:3). Scripture does not specify the number of times that an offender should be confronted on an individual basis. Scripture is clear that believers should be long-suffering and have an unrelenting desire for that person's repentance (I Corinthians 13:4-8a; I Peter 4:8). If there is no repentance then there is a responsibility to move to the next step in the process.

B. Second Step: Set up another private meeting, this time with one or two other witnesses present (Matthew 18:16). This step should never be taken in haste but only after there is prayerful conviction that Step One has not availed. If repentance occurs, the offender should seek forgiveness from the circle of offense, and no more.

It is important to understand who qualifies as a witness and what their function is in the disciplinary process. Biblically, a witness is a person who bears testimony of another's wrongdoing based on firsthand knowledge. A person is not constituted a witness who bears testimony based on hearsay, gossip, or secondhand knowledge (Deuteronomy 19:15-19). The Bible condemns false witnesses (Exodus 20:16). Accusations not substantiated by two or three witnesses must be left to the One who knows all things and judges righteously (Numbers 35:30; Psalm 51:3-4; Matthew 18:16). It is the function of a witness to insure that the offense is clearly and impartially presented and that nothing is left unsaid. The witnesses also keep each others' motivations and actions accountable before God (Matthew 18:20).

If there is no repentance, the circle of knowledge must be broadened at this point to include the Council of Elders for their consideration in order that Step Three might be taken.

C. Third Step: At this point, the matter must be brought by the Council of Elders to the members of Epsom Bible Church in a closed session (Matthew 18:17). The entire membership has a responsibility, as opportunity provides, to call the offender to repentance. An equitable period of time will be established by the Council of Elders in order to optimize the fullest effect of the witness of the entire membership, to allow for the work of the Lord and to provide more than ample time for repentance.

Should there be repentance, the entire body should be quick to respond with forgiveness, grace, and love (II Corinthians 2:5-8). While repentance and forgiveness are instantaneous, restoration to service will be monitored by the elders for the benefit and development of the person.

If there is no repentance, the Council of Elders will meet to take action on the final step.

D. Fourth Step: As defined in Matthew 18:17, the unrepentant offender will be considered a "pagan or a tax collector."

This phrase contains two interrelated aspects. First, the offender is likened to a "pagan", which signifies that the person is outside the community of God's blessing and grace. Second, the offender is likened to a "tax collector", which signifies that the person is untrustworthy and potentially dangerous.

By way of application, this constitutes a removal from church membership and fellowship resulting in a recognition that the unrepentant offender is outside the realm of God's blessings (I Corinthians 5:1-13). Common ground for intimate friendship has been removed. The entire congregation has an ongoing responsibility to act in unison, calling the person to repentance with all contact, so as not to undermine the Scriptural process or the severe temporal consequences of the person's obstinate behavior. It is sincerely hoped there will be repentance and reconciliation as a result of the consistent and loving application of this heart-wrenching but Biblical action.

The action of the church in matters of discipline carries the highest conceivable authority and is both final and binding as clearly stated in Matthew 18:18-20. There can be no appeal to any court as a result of this action (I Corinthians 6:1-2) and a member may not resign his/her membership in order to avoid church discipline.

SECTION 4. Integrity of Knowledge.

In all matters of church discipline, if and when members become aware of the offense and the disciplinary action being brought against the unrepentant individual, the members are expected, without exception, to hold the knowledge with integrity, avoiding gossip and the defamation of character (Ephesians 4:31-32; James 4:11). Church disciplinary matters are internal affairs and must not be paraded before the world.

ARTICLE X: CHURCH FINANCES

SECTION 1. Financial Donations.

No method of raising funds shall be instituted which is in conflict with the Scriptural ideals of the church. It is understood that membership in this church involves financial obligations to support the church and its causes with regular and proportionate giving. Each member shall be encouraged in Scriptural giving.

Believers are to give financially from an attitude of commitment to the Lord (II Corinthians 8:1-6). It is the policy of Epsom Bible Church to keep the congregation informed of financial needs by means of the weekly bulletin, announcements from the pulpit, or other means as necessary. This will not include individual solicitation of members to taking of financial pledges. The purpose of this information is not to coerce or pressure anyone into giving, but rather to provide avenues for giving as the Lord provides. Each believer is to give according to their ability with a cheerful heart (II Corinthians 9:7).

This body does not believe that the New Testament believer is required to tithe as was the Old Testament Jew. The tithe, which the Old Testament Law commanded, required that each Jew give a certain percentage of his income to the Lord. However, the Jews could give gifts above and beyond their tithe. The required tithe served more as a "tax" than a gift. Scripture records no such required tithe for believers in the church age. Each believer is to give as God provides from an attitude of cheerfulness and commitment to the Lord (II Corinthians 8:12-15; 9:7), recognizing that we are only stewards of what God already owns.

Special offerings may be sought from the congregation by recommendation of the Council of Elders. This shall not preclude individuals from making special gifts at any time as the Spirit of God may move them. If a gift is given with the directions to use it in whatever area has the greatest need, the Council of Elders will decide how that gift will be used.

SECTION 2. Financial Planning and Accountability.

Because giving is done unto the Lord, it is critical that the local church handle the finances given with care and wisdom both for the glory of the Lord and for the testimony of the church (II Corinthians 8:20-21). With this view in mind, the following outlines the policies for handling financial decisions and maintaining financial accountability:

A. The financial planning of Epsom Bible Church shall be carried out through the vehicle of an annual budget for the various programs of the ministry. The Council of Elders shall recommend and present the annual budget at a membership meeting to be held prior to the beginning of the

fiscal year in which the budget is to go into effect. At such meeting, the Council may seek a vote of affirmation from the membership with regard to the proposed budget in accordance with Article VI, Section 2(B): [*Elders*] Authority and Article VIII, Section 5: Voting and Member Meetings.

B. Matters involving staff compensation shall be the responsibility of the Council of Elders. All paid staff shall be paid a salary commensurate to their duties and abilities (I Corinthians 9:6-11; Galatians 6:6-7; I Timothy 5:17-18).

C. The local church has the privilege and responsibility to provide financial support for those in service for the Lord (missionaries, seminary students, etc. [II Corinthians 8:1-5; Philippians 4:14-17]). Epsom Bible Church will support certain of those in service as the Lord leads and provides. All of those supported must hold a doctrinal view in agreement with the Doctrinal Statement (Article IV) of Epsom Bible Church. The Board of Elders will recommend to the membership within the framework of the annual budget which individuals and ministries Epsom Bible Church will support.

D. The Council of Elders shall appoint a Treasurer who will be responsible for maintaining the financial records of the church. The Treasurer shall be at least deacon-qualified and shall have the responsibility of overseeing and accounting for the receipt of all donations and other income, the payment of all expenses, the keeping of all financial records, as well as the preparation of monthly reports for the Council of Elders; all in accordance with any and all applicable laws, the approved annual budget, and the expressed direction of the Council of Elders.

E. The Council of Elders shall periodically review, or appoint a committee of qualified members to review, the financial records of the church in order to verify that such records are being maintained honestly, accurately and in accordance with any and all applicable laws, the approved annual budget, and the expressed direction of the Council of Elders. If a committee is appointed to perform this function, it shall provide a report of its findings to the Council of Elders upon completion of its review.

F. The Council of Elders shall make an annual reporting of the church finances to the congregation. Such report shall include, but not be limited to, an accounting of all receipts to and disbursements from all church funds as well as the fiscal year-end balance of all church funds. Such reporting shall also include a comparison of actual fiscal year receipts and disbursements to the approved fiscal year budget.

SECTION 3. Indebtedness.

With regard to transactions contemplated by the Council of Elders which are not reflected in the approved annual budget; no note or contract exceeding 1% of the total annual budget, whereby the credit of the church is pledged, shall be made except by recommendation of the Council of Elders in a presentation to the members of the church at a duly called membership meeting. At such meeting, the Council may seek a vote of affirmation from the membership with regard to the contemplated transaction in accordance with Article VI, Section 2(B): [*Elders*] Authority and Article VIII, Section 5: Voting and Member Meetings.

SECTION 4. Authority to Bind the Church.

The Council of Elders are the only officers who have authority, in accordance with the church Constitution and By-laws, and any applicable laws, to execute legal documents relating to real estate, church property, and church finances.

ARTICLE XI: CHURCH PROPERTY

SECTION 1. Church Division.

In the event of a division of this church, from which may God in His mercy save us, the property of this church shall belong to that group of such division that represents the largest portion of the church membership, provided such group is loyal to this Constitution and By-laws; otherwise it shall belong to the group remaining loyal to this Constitution and By-laws though it may not be the largest group in such division.

SECTION 2. Church Dissolution.

Should a condition arise in the future when the church work/mission cannot continue, the church assets shall be liquidated. Proceeds from the liquidation shall be applied to the following:

1. the retirement of all outstanding debts of the church,
2. ministries in service for the Lord which are supported by the church and qualify as tax exempt per IRS Section 501(c)3.

The disposition of assets and IRS filing shall be the responsibility of the EBC treasurer in consultation with the EBC elders.

In the event of unassigned assets, a court of competent jurisdiction in Merrimack County shall dispose of said assets to organization(s), as said court shall determine, that meet the 501(c)3 tax exemption criteria.

SECTION 3. Church Consolidation.

Should conditions arise where a consolidation with another church of the same beliefs be advisable, the Council of Elders is authorized to negotiate the terms of such consolidation in so far as the property of this church is concerned.

ARTICLE XII: GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

SECTION 1. General Grievance.

Suggestions and proposals from the membership can be a vital and healthy avenue by which the Council of Elders may minister to the rest of the flock. When handled Scripturally, this type of communication edifies the body, ministers to the needs of the flock, helps preserve and promote unity within the church and brings glory to God.

Following the principles outlined above, any member of Epsom Bible Church who harbors a disagreement about any policy or procedure promoted by the church or the Council of Elders, should, as a first step, prayerfully and privately approach the Council. This may be done through informal consultation with an elder, by means of a signed letter to the Council, or meeting with the Council at the church member's request. It is recognized that these steps should be taken prior to public discussion of any issue so as to help the Council minister to the body more effectively and to help avoid discord and disunity within the flock (Proverbs 13:3; 16:27-28; 17:4).

The Council should seek to prayerfully accept and address any complaint thus presented and seek to resolve all problems in a manner which best promotes those benefits mentioned above (Proverbs 16:21-24; 18:13).

When these policies are not followed, causing factions and strife, it will be necessary to exercise church discipline to deal with the offending member in accordance with Article IX: Discipline (Titus 1:10-11; 3:10).

SECTION 2. Grievance against the Council of Elders.

If members of the church believe they are not being properly and Biblically led by any elder(s) on the Council or by the Council as a whole, either due to preaching or teaching that is contrary to the beliefs of the church as set forth in Article IV: Doctrinal Statement or to conduct that is unbefitting of elders, they are to follow the procedures of Matthew 18:15-16 and first discuss the issues with the elder(s) involved. If, after following the above procedures, the issue is not resolved, then two or more members have the right and may call for a membership meeting (Matthew 18:17; I Timothy 5:19-20), to be conducted in accordance with Article VIII, Section 5: Voting and Member Meetings, where the issues will be presented to the membership for their ruling on whether a valid grievance against any or all the elders exists. If the membership, at such time, finds that a valid grievance exists against any or all elders, they may also vote to remove any or all members of the Council.

ARTICLE XIII: AMENDMENTS

This Constitution and By-laws may be amended or replaced when the need for change is recognized by the elders and the members of the church. At the time such need is believed to be present, the elders, after consultation with the membership, shall make provisional modification in light of Scripture and all essential information on this matter shall be communicated to the congregation in written form, providing adequate time for study and response. A date will be proposed for discussion and acceptance of the revisions at a membership meeting. The membership will then vote to see if there is a unity of acceptance and understanding of the amendment(s) according to Article VIII, Section 5: Voting and Member Meetings. If so, the amendment(s) to the Constitution and By-laws will become effective.