

Constitution

Ridgeview Bible Church

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ARTICLE I: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THIS CONSTITUTION

This written document is a declaration of our beliefs and understanding of the Holy Scripture, as to our doctrinal beliefs, form of church government, organizational structure, and purposes as a body. 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 (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3, 13).

This is thus designed to be a statement of these things that it might promote a oneness of mind within our own ranks, 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 (Heb. 13:17). 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 (Eph. 1:22; 4:12-16). As we grow in the Word, this document is therefore subject to amendment according to the provisions of Article XIV. This document is, however, to be followed in all its parts as a protection to all or until part or all is amended according to its provisions.

ARTICLE II: NAME

The name of this local church shall be Ridgeview Bible Church, a corporation under the laws of the state of Nebraska.

ARTICLE III: MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

A. Our Mission

The supreme mission of the church, and so also of every individual believer, is to glorify God and to serve Him forever (Eph. 3:21; Rom. 11:36; 1 Pet. 4:11). Therefore, if what we do as a church, or as individuals, cannot serve the glory of God, it should not be done.

B. Our Goals

Our goals are to serve God and bring glory to Him. Certain God-ordained goals are established in Scripture for the local church. These are basically set forth in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

1. Equipping Believers

Equipping the saints unto the work of the ministry in all its aspects along with their spiritual maturity in the Lord is the second great goal of this church (Eph. 4:12-16; Col. 1:28-29).

2. Evangelization of the Lost

Reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ, both at home and abroad, is to be one of the goals of this church (Rom. 1:14-16; 1 Thess. 1:8; Acts 1:8).

C. Our Objectives

1. Internal Objectives and Functions

a. Instruction in the Word of God—Teaching: To stand for the historic, fundamental truths of Scripture, and through Scripture, to equip the saints for service, and for the building up of the body of Christ for unity, knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity, measured by the stature of the fullness of Christ, and for protection against the deceitful scheming of Satan (Eph. 4:12-16).

b. Fellowship: To encourage and provide for means of developing meaningful relationships among believers (expressions of sharing and caring for, and loving one another, warning, stimulating, and encouraging one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24-25; 13:1-2; Acts 2:42-47).

c. Worship: To provide the means for developing and expressing meaningful worship in prayer, songs of praise, adoration, admonishment, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper (Heb. 13:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:23-34; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:42).

d. Ministry: To provide the means for developing and exercising spiritual gifts for the edification of the body and the evangelization of the lost (Rom. 12:3-8; I Pet. 4:10-11).

2. External Objectives and Functions

a. Outreach: To present the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and to encourage them to trust in Him (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:2-10).

b. Holy Behavior: To live holy lives in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation acting as salt and as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15; Matt. 5:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:11-15; Col. 4:5).

c. Showing Mercy: To do good to all men whenever there is the opportunity and the means to do so within biblical principles and precepts (Gal. 6:10; Luke 10:29-37).

Our **mission, goals** and **objectives** set forth our philosophy of the local church and its ministry. This, in turn, must form the foundation for our thinking and activities as a body of people. It directs us in what we ought to be doing. Anything, which does not contribute to this philosophy of our mission, goals and objectives, should then be corrected, rejected or alleviated from the activities of the church.

ARTICLE IV: 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 consistent teaching and study of the Word of God (1 Tim. 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 (Psa. 119:1ff; 138:2; Isa. 77:2b; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 1:5; 4:1-16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 4:1-3).

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. To hold positions within Ridgeview Bible Church, all elders, ministerial staff, deacons and teachers must wholeheartedly agree with the Doctrinal Statement, Article V, of this church.

ARTICLE V: DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

- I. We believe in the inspiration and infallibility of the Bible: that every word and every part is inspired by God, that it is inerrant in the original autographs and that it is the final authority in faith and life. (II Timothy 3:16 – 17; II Peter 1:20 – 21)
- II. We believe in the Triune God; Father, Son and Spirit – One essence but three persons. (Matthew 28:18 – 19; John 14 – 17; II Corinthians 13:14; I John 5:1 – 21)
- III. We believe in the eternal Son of God, who became incarnate in the Lord Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, and who is true God and true man. (John 1:1,14,18, 5:18; Philippians 2:6-11; Colossians 1:19, 2:9; I Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 1:1-9; I John 5:20)
- IV. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, who regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and seals all believers in Christ and fills those yielded to God. (Acts 5:3-4; Matthew 28:19; John 3:3-7; Romans 8:9; I Corinthians 2:12, 6:19, 12:13; Ephesians 1:13, 4:30, 5:18)
- V. We believe that God created angels as sinless, spiritual beings. We believe that the highest of these sinned through pride and became the originator of sin – he is known as Satan. (Ezekiel 28:11 – 19; Zechariah 3:1-2; I Peter 5:8-9; Revelation 12:7-12.)
- VI. We believe that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth and everything in them. (Genesis 1 – 2; John 1:1-3)
- VII. We believe in the total depravity of man, who by nature and choice is both sinful and lost and has therefore incurred both physical and spiritual death. (Genesis 3; Romans 3, 5; Psalm 14:1-3, 51:5; Ephesians 2:1-3)
- VIII. We believe in the substitutionary atonement and sacrificial death of Christ; that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone on the basis of His death and resurrection. (Romans 3:21 – 26; Romans 5; II Corinthians 5:18 – 21; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7, 2:8-10; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:5-10)
- IX. We believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus, His ascension into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God the Father and is our Advocate and High Priest. (John 20 – 21; Acts 1:9-11, 5:30 – 32; I Corinthians 15:1 – 19; Hebrews 2:17 – 18, 4:14 – 16, 8:23 – 25, 9:11 – 14, 24)
- X. We believe in the eternal security of all believers. (Romans 8:28 – 39)
- XI. We believe in progressive sanctification. That this is separate from salvation, yet joined with it so that every believer, although pure in the sight of God by the blood of Christ, in this life goes through a maturing process of sanctification which is not complete until final glorification when he/she is with the Lord. This process is also done by the grace of God. (II Corinthians 3:18, 7:1; Galatians 3:1-5; Ephesians 4:17 – 24, I Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 10:10, 14)
- XII. We believe in the future bodily resurrection of all people, a conscious eternal destiny of either punishment or life with our Lord. (I Corinthians 15:20 – 58; Revelation 19:20, 20:5, 10 - 15, 21:8, 22:1 – 5)
- XIII. We believe in the pre-millennial and imminent return of Christ to earth. (Matthew 24, Revelation 20:4-6)
- XIV. We believe in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are a testimony for the believer to the body and the world of the salvation they already have, they are not a means of salvation. (Matthew 28:19, Luke 22:17 – 20; Acts 18:1 – 8; I Corinthians 11:23 – 26)
- XV. We believe that all believers who have received salvation by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ make up the church. We believe that the local church is a group of believers joined together voluntarily to worship God, to become mature, and to carry out the great commission. (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 2:42-47; Romans 12:5; I Corinthians 12: 12 – 27; Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:3-6)

ARTICLE VI: GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The local church body is composed of one body with many members all of whom are in vital relationship with Jesus Christ, but the body also has "joints of supply," units of control, and unity, i.e., church leaders (Eph. 4:16). This together suggests body participation under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ with leadership direction, submission and a authority in a two-directional manner.

First, the local government is invested in the body of believers who compose the local body under the headship of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 18:20; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 5:21; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

Second, executive authority or leadership, however, is invested by the congregation, as authorized by Scripture, in a Board 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 delegate to individuals, committees or other boards (as a Board of Deacons) authority and responsibility to carry out the business or ministry of the church in spiritual and physical (material) matters (Acts 20:28; 15:6; Eph. 4:11-12; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17).

In using its delegated authority, and in making its decisions, the Board of Elders must seek to be guided by the Scripture, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and by input from the congregation (Acts 20:32; 6:2-5a; 11:22; 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:19).

In the event of the misuse of the delegated authority, the church has recourse to the principles as set forth in Articles VII, XI, and XIII.

ARTICLE VII: ELDERS

A. Qualifications

Elders shall be men whose lives are characterized by the qualities set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

(1) These men shall hold to the doctrinal statement of this Constitution in accord with the statements of Article V, and be supportive of the entire Constitution.

B. Authority

The ministry of Ridgeview Bible Church shall be under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ working in and through the Board 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 by the Holy Spirit, and input from the body (Acts 6:5; 15:6, 22; Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

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 VI, the Lord Jesus leads and directs through both the body and the elders. Since the Lord Jesus dwells in each member of the body of Christ, and 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 body, especially on practical matters of church life. As a result of these biblical facts, in major decisions of church life, the congregation will vote to show a unified movement toward the direction in question and to show a sense of God's leading. The elders will not move forward with a decision until, or unless, the body demonstrates substantial agreement. The following illustrates the major areas of concern:

- (1) Making major financial decisions (Article XII).
- (2) Adding paid staff members (Article VIII).
- (3) Adding elders to the Board of Elders (Article VII).
- (4) Carrying out church discipline (Article XI).

NOTE: When a vote is taken, the procedure outlined in Article X, Section F shall be followed.

C. Duties

The elders must first and foremost exercise a personal spiritual walk, which promotes self-examination, maintain a servant-like quality in life, and serve with gentleness and humility in all that he does. Out of his biblical perspective, the elder is to joyfully undertake the following duties:

- (1) Give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- (2) Guard and protect the flock.
- (3) Oversee and provide spiritual direction for the activities and growth of the flock.
- (4) Aid in finding and developing gifted teachers of the Word (2 Tim. 2:2).
- (5) Warn and discipline as outlined in Article XI.
- (6) Support, encourage, counsel and lead in humility.
- (7) See to the appointment of deacons as per Article IX.
- (8) Provide guidance to the deacons as needed.
- (9) See to the oversight of the finances of the flock per Article XII.
- (10) Pray for and encourage the sick.
- (11) Seek the Lord's will to interpret the Articles and provisions of this Constitution in the light of Scripture.
- (12) 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.

The elders shall strive to maintain open communication with the flock, both to discern needs, concerns and viewpoints, and to communicate information and decisions. This may be done through the Sunday bulletin, pulpit announcements, group or congregational meetings and discussions (at least one such meeting held annually), votes, and one-on-one personal contact (Acts 6:1-5; 11:22; 15:1, 6, 22; 16:2).

D. Appointment (General Principles)

The Scriptures emphasize that the 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 body in the appointment of elders.

Either the elders or other members of the church body may recognize the need for an additional elder, paid or non-paid. The elders, in consultation with or in response to the request of body 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 Board 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 Ridgeview Bible Church to base the selection process upon an orderly, proper sequence of events, which will most easily facilitate the recognition of God's appointment of men to this ministry. The whole flock 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 and paid elders (1 Tim. 5:17-18). The following procedures outline the steps necessary to appoint elders:

E. Appointment of Non-Paid Elders

When the need arises for a new non-paid elder (either for a new position or to replace an elder who has left the Board), the existing Board of Elders should assume a guiding and directing role in the search for the right man. The specific nature of the need and the decision to seek a new elder should be announced to the flock. The flock will be asked to suggest qualified men for the position based on the biblical criteria for elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9; Acts 14:23; 6:1f).

After a period of time and prayerful consideration, the elders will meet to consider all the nominees as to their qualifications for the position. If the Board believes a man to be qualified, after they have considered the man's qualifi-

cations, a member of the Board will be appointed to approach each nominee to explain the specific nature of the need and to determine his willingness to serve (1 Tim. 5:22).

If the elder nominee(s) signifies his understanding of the specific nature of the need and his willingness to serve, the board will announce this to the flock. A time and place will be announced for conducting a vote by the flock to insure substantial agreement among the flock and of God's selection of the nominee(s). The vote will be conducted as outlined in Article X, Section F.

After the above steps are successfully completed, the appointment of the man as a non-paid elder will be announced to the flock. The Board of Elders will ordain the new elder.

F. Tenure

Elders are appointed to an indefinite tenure consistent with their continued desire and ability to serve in this capacity. This must be evaluated and recognized by themselves, by the other elders, and by the church body (Rom. 12:3-8). The removal of elders from office shall be effected by personal resignation or by disciplinary actions in accordance with the following:

G. Voluntary Resignation

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

H. Involuntary Dismissal

Involuntary dismissal of any elder, paid or non-paid, will be a disciplinary action of the church body in accordance with the instruction of 1 Timothy 5:19-20; Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-18. The specific procedures for this are spelled out in Article XI with the following differences:

(1) If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, or believes he has been unfairly treated, then it is to be brought before the congregation to hear the issues and to allow the person concerned to present his case. It will then be decided by a simple majority vote of the body at a congregational meeting. The body must be informed of such meeting at least two weeks prior to the time of the meeting.

(2) If members of the body believe they are not being properly and biblically represented by the Board or any member of the Board, they are to follow the procedures of Matthew 18:15-16 and first discuss the issues with the Board of Elders. If, after following the above procedures, the issue is not resolved, then they have the right and may call for a congregational meeting (Matt. 18:17) where the issues may be presented and ruled on by a simple majority vote of the congregation. Again, a two-week announcement period will be necessary before the meeting can be held. The congregation, at such time, may remove any or all members of the Board.

ARTICLE VIII: PAID ELDERS AND STAFF

A. Paid Elder(s): Pastor-Teacher

The paid elder(s) plays a critical role in the growth, maturity, spirituality and effectiveness of the church. He is responsible for the quality and content of the teaching and counseling within the flock (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 4:6-16). Ridgeview Bible Church recognizes that the Lord has given spiritual gifts to all believers and therefore does not expect the paid elder(s) to provide all the teaching, evangelism and counseling, etc., within the body (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Rather they are to equip the saints "for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12).

B. Paid Elder(s): Duties, Qualifications and Authority

The duties, qualifications and authority of the paid elder(s) shall be the same as for non-paid elders (Article VII), with the following additional duties:

- (1) Provide the majority of the teaching during worship services (1 Tim. 4:13).
- (2) Provide guidance, as needed, to the Board of Elders concerning church business and spiritual concerns within the body.
- (3) The senior paid elder shall supervise the paid church staff (secretaries, assistant pastors, youth pastors, etc.) and shall be an ex-officio member of each and every board and or committee.
- (4) Coordinate the administration of the ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper).

C. Paid Elder(s): Selection

Upon recognition of the need for a new senior paid elder, the Board of Elders will guide and direct the selection process. The attitude of the Board should be one of submission to the Lord, waiting on Him to fill the need with the right man. They should also be expectant, knowing that God will provide a person to fill the need.

The following procedure outlines the method Ridgeview Bible Church will follow in selecting a new senior paid elder:

- (1) The selection committee shall be appointed with a member of the Board of Elders as the head of the committee. The committee shall consist of non-paid elders, along with members of the flock as chosen by the elders.
- (2) The committee shall seek the names and resumes from any qualified and interested men by any means at their disposal. This may include contacting doctrinally sound seminaries to assist in finding qualified men for the position and seeking information from the congregation about possible candidates.
- (3) The committee will carefully and prayerfully consider any resumes submitted. The resumes will be evaluated in light of the man's experience, interests, doctrinal beliefs, and philosophy of the ministry and in light of the needs of the flock.
- (4) The committee will contact one or more men who appear to fill the needs of the church based on the resumes and other gathered information. The men may be invited to visit the church one or more times. These visit(s) should include time for the committee and flock to evaluate the man and his family, time for him to present the Word and time for him to evaluate the church and the community. Attendance of a man's family is not required on the first visit.
- (5) After each visit, the committee will prayerfully consider the candidate. During the process, they will seek input from the flock concerning the individual. After evaluation of the candidate(s), the committee will announce their recommendation to the flock.
- (6) A congregational meeting will be called to vote to see if there is unified agreement with the committee's recommendation. The meeting date should be at least two (2) weeks after the committee's recommendation is reported to allow the church ample time to prayerfully consider the decision. The vote will be conducted as outlined in Article X, Section F.
- (7) If the man turns down the offer, or if the flock does not agree with the committee's recommendation, the above procedure will be repeated until a qualified man is called.

D. Paid Elder(s): Tenure and Removal

Tenure and removal of a paid elder will follow the same guidelines as outlined in Article VIII.

E. Associate Pastoral Staff

Any member of the church body or leadership may recognize the need for paid associate pastoral staff to assist in meeting the needs of the flock. Such a need must be agreed to by the senior paid elder (in consultation with the Board of Elders) before action is taken. The need for this expenditure should be discussed with the flock.

The procedure for hiring associate pastoral staff members shall be the same as for a senior paid elder. The senior paid elder will automatically head the selection committee for any associate staff.

All paid pastoral staff will look to the senior paid elder for supervision of their duties and for periodic reviews of their performance. A written job description will be prepared for all paid staff members. The senior paid elder in consultation with the Board of Elders will prepare this description.

After appropriate consultation with the church leadership, a recommendation by the senior paid elder will be sufficient for modifying the duties or redirecting the efforts of any paid staff member. Removal of any associate pastoral staff member shall follow the same guidelines as outlined in Article VIII.

F. Non-Pastoral Staff

The hiring of baby sitters, janitorial services, secretary, etc., will be planned for and directed by the Board of Elders.

Since the secretary will be working primarily for the senior paid elder, he will make the final decision, in consultation with the Board of Elders, on who will fill the position.

ARTICLE IX: DEACONS

A. Qualifications

Deacons shall be men who desire to be servants of the local church body, who are able to serve, who meet all the qualifications of Scripture set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-12, and who are conscientiously and wholeheartedly in agreement with the Constitution of this church.

B. Duties

In Acts 6:1-4, certain men were appointed to minister to the physical needs of the flock, to relieve the elders so they would have more time to concentrate on prayer and on the Word. These were undoubtedly the first deacons and functioned as helpers to the leaders of the Jerusalem church. (These leaders were forerunners of the elders in the New Testament church.)

Deacons shall be helpers of the elders in ministering to the needs of the body, especially the physical needs (such as caring for the building and property), though they may serve in other capacities as their gifts and training allows.

The elders according to the need of the church and a deacon's particular gifts, capacities and talents, will designate their specific duties.

C. Appointment

Deacons 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.

First Timothy 3:10 teaches that potential deacons are to be tested. The primary means of testing is time; time for the flock to evaluate a man's commitment to the Lord, his qualifications according to 1 Timothy 3:8-12, his doctrinal understanding and his willingness to serve the local body. The flock and the Board of Elders should be on the alert to those men who demonstrate the qualifications of a deacon.

In the New Testament church, both the church leaders and the flock played an important role in choosing deacons (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons will be appointed as the need arises. However, only qualified and willing men will be appointed. If no qualified men 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 man or men to meet the need.

The following outlines the procedure Ridgeview Bible Church will follow in selecting deacons:

- (1) The Board of Elders shall decide if the need for a deacon(s) exists.
- (2) When there is a need, then the Board shall notify the congregation of the need and ask them to recommend to the Board those men whom they believe meet the qualifications.
- (3) The Board of Elders will review the names submitted to them along with any additional names of men they believe to be qualified.

(4) 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.

(5) The elders will then appoint that man (men) whom they believe to be the most qualified to serve according to the specific needs and the qualifications.

D. Removal of Deacons

1. Voluntary

A deacon may voluntarily step down from his position at any time he so chooses. The deacon should prayerfully reflect on his decision and seek counsel from the Board of Elders before making a final decision.

2. Involuntary Dismissal

Involuntary dismissal of a deacon shall be in accord with the procedures for church discipline outlined in Article XI. If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, the Board may remove him from office, but only after the principles for church discipline have been prayerfully considered and followed (Matt. 18:15-18).

ARTICLE X: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A. Union in the Universal Body of Christ

At the time of personal faith in Jesus Christ, the believer is called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:2, 9; 12:12-13, 20; Col. 1:18), and joined into union with the universal body of Christ, the church, by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13; Col. 1:18).

B. Union With a Local Assembly of Believers

There is another aspect of this fellowship into which the believer is joined. He is brought into the fellowship of fellow members of that body, other living believers on earth, that he might share and participate in the various blessings and ministries of the body of Christ. For this to occur properly, believers are to seek the fellowship of one another in a local body or assembly of believers to which they are to become responsible, a mini-flock, so to speak, of the greater and universal flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2-3; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

Believers in isolation, operating independently of other believers of a local assembly, is an idea contrary to Scripture. 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 (Eph. 4:4-6; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; 1 Cor. 1:2; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13). The local church is to be a body of people allotted to the charge of elders (1 Pet. 5:1-3; 1 Thess. 5:11; Heb. 10:14-15; 1 Pet. 4:8-10; 1 Cor. 12:20-27), and subject to the discipline of that body or assembly (1 Cor. 5:2; 1 Thess. 5:14 [admonish the unruly], 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; 1 Tim. 5:20).

This of necessity implies more than a loose relationship of a believer or believers to a particular body or assembly. It involves a tie, an involvement, a commitment, responsibility and submission to both the leadership and to each other.

C. Church Membership

The Scriptures contain neither a mandate for nor a command against an official membership roll. In Acts, we see that believers were added to the church in Jerusalem; however, this serves primarily to show the growth in the early church (Acts 2:47; 9:31; 16:5). These people were devoting themselves to a local assembly and its leadership for teaching, leadership, fellowship and worship (Acts 2:42). There were also letters of commendation or acceptance written on behalf of both men and women to be welcomed and accepted into the fellowship or various assemblies. These letters commended believers to other assemblies regarding their faithfulness and ministry and thus they were not a transfer of membership by letter (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:10; Col. 4:10; 2 Cor. 3:1; 8:16-24).

The emphasis of these Scriptures is that every believer become identified and committed to a specific local assembly of believers following the leading and direction of God. Their attitude, faith, attendance, involvement, giving and sub-

mission to that assembly reveal this commitment. Thus a membership roll cannot, in and of itself, serve as the sole means of commitment a believer has to a local body.

Ridgeview Bible Church does have a membership roll to aid in conducting business in an orderly manner and to provide legal protection in important, yet potentially controversial church decisions (such as discipline, Article XI). An individual's decision to be placed on the membership roll should flow from their commitment to the church. The individual should remember that being on the membership roll has no merit or value so far as his spiritual maturity or growth is concerned. It is, however, an important tool in helping the church function smoothly.

D. Procedure for Membership

Any individual who confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior and who is in agreement with this Constitution is qualified and eligible for membership in Ridgeview Bible Church. Anyone who desires to become a member should contact one of the elders and request membership. The board of Elders will meet with the individual to discuss this decision. If the individual meets the qualifications for membership, he/she will be placed on the roll and will be acknowledged before the flock as a new member.

E. Membership Roll

The elders will review the membership roll semi-annually. Members may be removed from the roll by the member's choice, by church discipline (Article XI), or by noninvolvement with the body. If an individual appears to no longer be involved with the church, an elder(s) will meet with the person to verify their membership status. No individual will be removed from the roll without being contacted by an elder.

F. Voting and Congregational 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 flock on an issue. We believe that unity in the faith is of utmost importance (I Cor. 1:10) and that God is able to grant that unity. (Romans 15:5-6) When a congregation is gathered to vote on an issue the question will be: With the information and through prayer and scripture, how many of you will affirm Gods leading through the elders in this matter?

The elders will not move forward on any major issue (Article 7 section B) unless or until God brings the congregation to unity. In any flock there will be varying degree of spiritual maturity and at times willful disobedience. Furthermore God's perfect timing will be involved in adjusting individuals to his perfect will. For these reasons, congregational unity will be subject to the prayerful judgment of the elder board and does not necessarily mean a unanimous vote.

Any member of the church 18 years or older may vote. The person may vote in person or they may vote absentee. An absentee vote is valid if the person writes down on any piece of paper the issue being voted on, their vote, and their signature. Absentee votes must be turned in to an elder no later than the date of the meeting.

The means of voting will normally be by showing 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. The flock will be advised of the date and time of a meeting for a vote at least two weeks prior to the meeting. Whenever possible a time of discussion followed by prayer should be held in a separate meeting prior to the vote.

Note: The term "vote" means to affirm the elder's decision.

ARTICLE XI: CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We believe in the responsibility and necessity of church discipline as clearly outlined in Scripture. It is a very difficult area and hard to practice. Nevertheless, church discipline has the divine authority of Scripture and is vital to the purity of the church. In church discipline, the following matters must be carefully understood and applied.

A. The Pattern and Basis for Discipline

The discipline of the church is first patterned after the fact that the Lord Himself disciplines His children (Heb. 12:6) and, as a father delegates part of the discipline of the children to the wife, so the Lord has delegated the discipline of the church family to the church itself.

Discipline is further based on the holy character of God (1 Pet. 1:16; Heb. 12:11). The pattern of God's holiness, his desire for the church to be holy, set apart unto Him, is an important reason for the necessity of church discipline. The church is therefore to clean out the leaven of malice and wickedness from its ranks (1 Cor. 5:6-8). A failure to discipline in a church today evidences a lack of awareness of the holiness of God.

Church discipline must be patterned after and based on the divine commands of Scripture. We have numerous passages, which both command and give us biblical directives on the how, when and where of church discipline. Again, a failure to exercise this responsibility demonstrates a lack of obedience and belief in the authority of the Bible (1 Cor. 5:1-13; Matt. 18:17-18; Titus 3:10; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; 1 Tim. 5:20; Gal. 6:1).

A final basis for the necessity of church discipline is the testimony of the church in the world. The world observes the behavior and life of the church. When the church acts no differently than the world it loses its credibility and authenticity (1 Pet. 2:11-18; 3:8-16; 4:1-4).

B. The Purposes of Church Discipline

- (1) Concern for the glory of God and the testimony of the flock.
- (2) The restoration and building up of the sinning believer.
- (3) The winning of a soul to Christ (if only a professing Christian).
- (4) The purity of the local body and its protection from moral and doctrinally impure influences, knowing a little leaven can leaven the entire lump (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

Such goals automatically govern the spirit in which all disciplinary action is to be given. Thus:

(1) It must be done in the spirit of humility, gentleness and patience, looking to yourself lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:24-25).

(2) Those who walk disorderly are to be admonished, warned, and appealed to in love (1 Thess 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:2). This admonishing, etc., is not restricted to the leaders but may be done by any member (1 Thess. 5:14).

(3) If there is no response in repentance and obedience, then members are to withhold intimate fellowship until there is obedience (2 Thess. 3:6, 14). This is to indicate to the offender that his action has caused a rupture in the harmony of the body. Its goal is restoration and the person is still to be counted as a brother (2 Thess. 3:14-15).

(4) If the person persists after admonition and withdrawal of intimate fellowship, the final step is rejection or breaking of fellowship (Titus 3:10; Matt. 18:17b), accompanied by public rebuke before all (1 Tim. 5:20). Examples of church discipline are found in Scripture. The Corinthian believers were to be "gathered together" in order to take action against the offending brother (1 Cor. 2:6). We also find that it was the whole church in Rome and in Thessalonica who were to take action with regard to the unruly and schismatic and not just a few (2 Thess. 3:6-15; Rom. 16:17).

(5) Finally, discipline in the name of our Lord always includes a readiness to forgive. The many or majority who discipline must also be ready and eager to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love to the sinning person (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

C. The Practice of Church Discipline

1. When it is to be Practiced

Great care must be exercised here. Scripture does not warrant the exercise of church discipline for an individual or a church's pet taboos or peeves. According to Scripture, there are five categories, which warrant church discipline. These are:

- a. Difficulties between members (Matt. 18:15-17).
- b. Divisiveness. People causing divisions in the church. (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11).
- c. Disorderly conduct. Conduct clearly out of line with the prescribed commands of Scripture (2 Thess. 3:6-15).
- d. Sins of the type mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5: incest, immorality, covetousness, idolatry, abusive speech, drunkenness, and swindling (1 Cor. 5:1, 11).
- e. False teaching. Erroneous teaching and views which concern the fundamentals of the faith, not lesser differences of interpretation. (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; also implied in Rev. 2:14—16; Phil. 3:2-3, 15-19; Rom. 16:17-18).

The key concerns here are: (a) the holy character of God, (b) the testimony of the flock, (c) the effect upon the unity and purity of the flock, and (d) the edification and restoration of the individual.

2. How it is to be Practiced

Scriptural procedure here is clear and specific steps are prescribed. They are as follows:

a. Recognize the offense. Caution—one must be sure it is an offense, which calls for discipline. Again, the Word is our criterion.

b. Seek private correction and/or reconciliation with the offender (Matt. 18:15). This is when the problem involves two believers. The one offended or the one who recognizes the offense is to go privately and try to rectify the problem. If this fails, he is to take witnesses, preferably spiritual leaders, so that if it has to be brought before the whole church it can be firmly proven or established (Matt. 18:16-17).

c. Seek reconciliation through the spiritual leadership if the problem involves an offense that is against the whole body, or is a threat to its unity. Initiatory action following the concept of Galatians 6:1 should be taken by the mature spiritual leaders of the church rather than by just one person. "You who are spiritual" in Galatians 6:1 is plural meaning literally, "you, the spiritual ones ..." These initial contacts provide opportunity for loving admonition, correction and forgiveness. On the other hand, if these first steps are not heeded, it constitutes a warning that further action will be taken and gives occasion for serious rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:12-14; Titus 2:15; 3:10).

d. Seek reconciliation through the whole body. If further action is necessary, it is to be taken before the whole church (Matt. 18:17). This action would consist of a minimum of loss of voting privileges, but may result in more severe action. Any action taken must be approved by a congregational vote as outlined in Article X, Section F.

In essence then, this is the action of the Lord carrying out discipline through the action of the whole body through the leadership of the elders or the spiritually mature (1 Cor. 5:4 "in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled, with the power of our Lord Jesus ..."). Similar heavenly authority is seen in the ratification of this disciplinary action as spelled out in Matthew 18:18-19).

ARTICLE XII: FINANCES

Believers are to give financially from an attitude of commitment to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:1-6). It is the policy of Ridgeview 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 his or her ability with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 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 (2 Cor. 8:12-15; 9:7), recognizing that we are only stewards of what God already owns.

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 (2 Cor. 8:20-21). With this view in mind, the following outlines the policies of handling financial decisions:

(1) All paid staff shall be paid a salary commensurate to their duties and abilities (1 Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6-7; 1 Cor. 9:6-11).

(2) All gifts given as a designated gift will be used as designated so long as those designations are in accord with biblical principles. If any special gifts are given with the directions to use it in whatever area has the greatest need, the board of Elders will decide how that gift will be used. All other gifts will go into the general fund.

(3) The local church has the privilege and responsibility to provide financial support for those in service for the Lord (missionaries, seminary students, etc. [Phil. 4:14-17; 2 Cor. 8:1-5]). Ridgeview Bible Church will support certain of those in service as the Lord leads and provides. **All of these supported must hold a doctrinal view in agreement with the doctrinal statement presented in this Constitution.** The Board of Elders will recommend to the congregation, which people and ministries Ridgeview Bible Church will support.

(4) Depending on the amount of money involved, the senior paid elder may make a financial decision by himself, or the Board of Elders may make the decision alone or with the substantial agreement of the congregation.

(5) On an annual basis, during the first quarter of the year, a finance committee will be appointed to examine the salaries of all paid salary members, the amount of support given to the persons and ministries supported in number 3 above, and the expenditure limits for the paid elder(s) and Board of Elders. This committee shall consist of at least two elders and the church treasurer. All recommendations concerning changes in these areas will first be presented to the Board of Elders. The elders will present the budget to the congregation.

(6) In order to keep orderly records, a treasurer shall be appointed by the Board of Elders. The treasurer shall keep all necessary books, write necessary checks to pay bills, prepare monthly financial statements and any other duties as prescribed by the Board of Elders.

ARTICLE XIII: GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Suggestions and proposals from the flock can be a vital and healthy avenue by which the leadership 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 the flock who harbors a disagreement about any policy or procedure promoted by the church or its leadership, should as a first step, prayerfully and privately approach the leadership. This may be done through informal consultation with an elder, by means of a signed letter to the Board, or meeting with the Board 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 leadership minister to the body more effectively and to help avoid discord and disunity within the flock (Prov. 13:3; 16:27-28; 17:4).

The church leadership 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 (Prov. 16:21-24).

When these policies are not followed, causing factions and strife, it will be necessary to exercise church discipline to deal with the offending member as per Article XI (Titus 2:10-11).

ARTICLE XIV: AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended or replaced when the elders and the members of the church body recognize the need for change. At the time such need is believed to be present, the elders, after consultation with the body, 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 acceptance of the revisions at a congregational meeting. The congregation will then vote to see if there is a unity of acceptance and understanding of the amendments according to Article X, Section F. If so, the amendments to the Constitution will become effective.

ARTICLE XI: DISSOLUTION OF PROPERTY

The decision to dissolve or disband must be approved by two-thirds of the membership of the congregation by means of the procedure outlined in Article X, Section F.