



Waterford Baptist Church Constitution

Waterford Baptist Church Constitution INTRODUCING THE CHURCH

Name and Purpose

Name:

This local fellowship of Christians is known as Waterford Baptist Church. We are a fellowship of believers, who have experienced repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour. As such, we desire to bring glory to Him by living lives consistent with our Christian profession.

The purpose of the Church is:

- (i) To provide for the united worship of God in praise and prayer;
- (ii) To provide for the spiritual growth of believers through fellowship, teaching and pastoral care;
- (iii) To seek earnestly to spread the gospel of God's grace, persuading men to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their only Lord and Saviour.

1. BASIS OF DOCTRINE

1.1 The Scriptures The verbal inspiration and total inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments¹ as originally given by God;

¹**OT:** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi **NT:** Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, Jude, Revelation.

their sole sufficiency and final authority in all matters of faith and practice.²

1.2 God

One God in three persons, the Holy Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit: co-equal, co-eternal, sovereign and active in creation, providence and redemption.³

1.3 The Lord Jesus Christ

The essential deity and perfect humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and men; his virgin birth, sinless life and sacrificial death on the cross as the only substitute for sinners; His burial, bodily resurrection and ascension to heaven; His high priestly ministry and personal return.⁴

1.4 The Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating the sinner and in indwelling, sanctifying and empowering the believer.⁵

1.5 The Devil

The personality of the devil; his evil activity and final doom.⁶

1.6 Man

²2 Sam. 23:2; Jer. 1:9; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21.

³Deut. 6:4; 2 Sam. 7:22; Eph. 4:6; Rev. 4:1; John 16:13-15; Acts 13:2; Rom. 8:16, 26, 27.

⁴Is. 53:4-6; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18.

⁵John 3:5-8; 17:17; Rom. 8:9; Zech. 4:6.

⁶Job 1:6-12; Matt. 4:1-11; John 8:44.

The creation of man in the image of God;
 the entrance of sin through Adam's disobedience;
 the fallen and totally depraved state of all men;
 their subjection to God's wrath and condemnation;
 their responsibility to repent and believe the Gospel.⁷

1.7 Justification

The justification of the sinner by God's grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone; the eternal security of the believer.⁸

1.8 The Church

The local church as a company of baptised believers gathered under the headship of Christ for worship, fellowship and evangelism;
 the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper:

baptism being the immersion of believers on profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a symbol of their identification with Him in His death, burial and resurrection;
 the Lord's Supper being a remembrance of Christ until He comes and a renewal of commitment to Him,⁹
 the office of elder and deacon;
 the gifts of evangelist and pastor-teacher;
 the priesthood of all believers and their unity in the body of Christ;
 the separation of church and state.¹⁰

1.9 The Future State

The unconditional immortality of the soul;

⁷Gen. 3:1-24; Rom. 1:18-32; 3:10-18; Eph. 2:1ff.

⁸Acts 13:38-39; Rom. 3:21-4:25; 5:1-9.

⁹We recognise as normative that the ordinance of baptism should precede participation in the Lord's Supper.

¹⁰Matt. 26:26-28; 28:19; Mk. 14:22-24; Lk. 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 2:41.

The resurrection of the body;
 The eternal joy in heaven of the believer;
 The conscious eternal punishment in hell of those who die impenitent.¹¹

1.10 Christian Behaviour

The responsibility of all believers to obey and serve the Lord and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives;
 The duty of the church to exercise godly discipline in a loving and caring fashion;
 The obligation to do good to all men as opportunity arises, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.¹²

2. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Church membership¹³ will be open to all who:

- 2.1 Profess repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2.2 Have been baptised by immersion and whose lives bear evidence of their Christian profession.
- 2.3 Hold that the truths expressed in the *Basis of Doctrine* shall be the rule of the church.
- 2.4 Agree to submit to and support the elders (**Scripture Refs.**).
- 2.5 Procedure for membership:
 Application for membership shall be dealt with by the elders who will acquaint the applicant with the Church Constitution. Where

¹¹Eccl. 12:7; Luke 16:19-31; Job 19:26-27; John 5:28-29, 10:27-30; 1 Cor. 15:35-38; Rom. 8:29-30, 35-38; Is. 66:24; Matt. 25:31-46.

¹²Eph. 2:10, 4:17-5:21; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; 1 John 3:2-3; Gal. 6:10.

¹³Rom. 12:1-21; 15:30-31; 1 Cor. 9:14; 12:12-13; 2 Cor. 8:1-15; Heb. 10:24-25.

there is evidence of repentance and the grace of God in the applicant and where the applicant holds Basis of Doctrine such application to be submitted to the church with recommendation for acceptance, or otherwise.

2.6 Responsibilities and privileges of membership:

Church members ought to

- a) Walk in holiness and brotherly love, honouring God in their lives and encouraging one another in love and good works;
- b) At all times be loyal to each other, being patient with one another's weaknesses and failings;
- c) Meet together on the Lord's day and at all other meetings of the church as far as possible;
- d) Pray for and encourage the officers of the church;
- e) Contribute, according to their income, to the financial needs of the church.

3. DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH

- 3.1 We believe that members are admitted into all the privileges and discipline of the local church.
- 3.2 In matters of personal offence members should first seek reconciliation with one another privately. If this fails the elders of the church should be consulted, and if need be the matter should be submitted to the judgement of the church itself.
- 3.3 Believers should not take brothers in Christ to the civil law, nor should they disturb the peace of the church over personal disputes.
- 3.4 All discipline of the church should be exercised with love and patience, as well as in accordance with teaching and examples of the Word, and the end in view must always be the repentance and reconciliation of the offender, and the purity and blessing of the church.
- 3.5 In the case of a member accepting or propagating erroneous doctrines and also in the event of a member being guilty of such open sin as would bring public dishonour to the Gospel, he shall be subject to the censure of the church and in the unhappy event of persistent impenitence, exclusion. The same to apply in the case of one party in a dispute refusing to be reconciled.
- 3.6 Any member lapsing from their commitment by being absent from the church over three months and without satisfactory reason being given to a visiting elder, may be recommended to a Church members' meeting for disciplinary action.¹⁴

¹⁴Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:13-6:7; Gal. 1:6-9; Heb. 13:17.

4. CHURCH GOVERNMENT¹⁵

- 4.1 In accordance with New Testament principles, we have two permanent offices in the local church, namely, Elders and Deacons. Elders are appointed from among the men in the church; deacons may be men or women.

All who hold office, and who have a teaching function in the church, must hold the basis of doctrine without reservation.

4.2 Elders

It is our desire to have at least one full time Elder in office – to exercise the gifts of Pastor/Teacher – who will be supported financially by the church. Where possible there will be a minimum of two elders and, subject to biblical qualifications, this number will be increased as the church grows

The elders will be responsible for the spiritual well being of the church. This involves giving themselves to prayer, the ministry of the Word and the care of all members by encouragement and the exercising of discipline. They are to regulate all church gatherings, interview applicants for baptism and church membership and recommend the appointment of additional elders and deacons. The qualifications for eldership are revealed in the Word of God, in particular in 1 Tim. 3:1-7 and Tit. 1:5-9. Such passages are the guide to the recognition of new elders. They are to be read out and explained whenever someone is being considered for eldership.

4.3 The Appointment of Elders

God alone is able to raise up men for the office of Eldership. It is the duty of the church to recognise the work of God in equipping potential elders with the necessary qualifications and gifts. It shall be the elders' responsibility, in fellowship with the other church

¹⁵Acts 6:1-6; 20:28-31; Titus 1:5, 9; 1 Pet. 5:1-5.

officers, to bring such before the church for approval and recognition.

A month shall be left for objections to be raised and questions asked. A seventy-five percent majority vote of members present at a Special Church Meeting, who are entitled to vote and who have voted, shall be required to confirm the appointment, but unanimity is to be regarded as the ideal.

At the appropriate gathering the appointment of the elder shall be ratified by prayer and the laying on of hands.

In the event of there being no elders in the church the responsibility for the recommendation of an elder shall rest with an appointment committee agreed by the church. They may seek the help of other elders of a like minded church in making decisions. It is the policy of the church to look first within the existing membership for a suitably gifted full-time elder. If no such person is found, the church shall then look to the wider body of Christ.

4.4 Discipline of Elders

An elder shall be removed from office should he neglect his duty, be guilty of sinful behaviour, fall into doctrinal error or hold views contrary to our basis of doctrine. If an accusation is made against an elder the directions of 1 Tim. 5:19-20 are to be followed. The other elders are to approach the matter with great caution, firmness and impartiality. In the case of their being no elder (or elders), the church will seek the help of elders of a like minded church. The person in view will be subject to the same voting criteria that applies to the electing of an elder. Those appointed will act in the capacity of elders.

5. DEACONS

- 5.1 The qualifications of a deacon are laid down in the Word of God, particularly in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. The passage to be read and explained to the church whenever anyone is being considered for the office of deacon.

The deacons are responsible for administering the various affairs of the church,¹⁶ e.g., finance and the maintaining of the church premises. They are to assist the elders in whatever ministry

might benefit the health and well being of church life, thus enabling the elders to exercise their pastoral and teaching ministry.

5.2 The Appointment of Deacons

The appointment of this office is to be carried out in the same manner as for eldership. Those appointed are God's gift to the church.

Appointments will be reviewed annually to assess the current needs of the church.

5.3 Discipline of Deacons

The same directions apply for removal from office as for elders.

6. CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

- 6.1 The church officers shall summon the church as often as may be considered necessary, but there shall not be less than two meetings per year. Between ten and fourteen days written notice, setting out the full business to be discussed, shall be given to all members. No new business shall be introduced without prior notice to the church officers. All the activities and business of the church are to be reviewed at the first business meeting of the year, including the full

¹⁶Acts 6:1-6

time elder's salary. A full financial statement is to be presented at this meeting.

- 6.2 Those under the age of eighteen who are members will only have the right to vote at the discretion of the elders.
- 6.3 All appointment to office will be made at these meetings, and will be decided by secret ballot.

7. AMENDMENTS TO CHURCH CONSTITUTION

- 7.1 Any amendments to this constitution will be made only by an eighty percent majority vote at an annual general meeting or special meeting convened for the purpose. All members must be circulated with a written copy of the proposed amendment between ten and fourteen days before the meeting. A minimum of seventy five percent of the voting membership must be present.
- 7.2 All amendments to the Church Constitution will be made by secret ballot.
- 7.3 All amendments to the Church Constitution are to reflect the Church's Trust Deed.