



***The Constitution of Trinity
Reformed Baptist Church***

**THE CONSTITUTION
OF
TRINITY REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**

PREAMBLE

We, the members of the Trinity Reformed Baptist Church, do ordain and establish the following Articles, to which we voluntarily and solemnly submit ourselves.

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this church shall be the Trinity Reformed Baptist Church.

ARTICLE 2 - PURPOSE

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

ARTICLE 3 - AFFILIATION

AUTHORITY. We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Head of the Church and who directs the affairs of the Church through Elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture. The Elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand under the authority of Holy Scripture.

COOPERATION. The church may and does cooperate with other likeminded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern. We may seek the assistance and counsel of other churches in matters of special concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church.

ASSOCIATIONS. One special kind of fellowship and cooperation with other churches is formal membership in an association of churches. Upon recommendation of the Elders (using congregationally approved criteria), such affiliations may be entered into and withdrawn from with the expressed consent and approval of the congregation. The Elders shall review (using approved criteria) annually such affiliations entered into and shall, based on their findings recommend continuation or withdrawal from such affiliations.

**ARTICLE 4 – COVENANT
Please see Appendix A**

ARTICLE 5 - ARTICLES OF FAITH

We adopt as the fullest expression of our faith the *London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*. The ultimate authority in all matters of faith, order, and morals is and must be the Bible alone, which truth is clearly set forth in the opening article of the Confession itself. This historic document is, however, an excellent summary of "the things most surely believed among us," and we find it to be assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. Here the members of our church will have a body of Divinity in small compass and by means of Scriptural proofs will be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them (I Pet. 3:15). In addition to the *London Confession*, we also accept the *Abstract of Principles*, the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, and the *Cambridge Declaration* as further and supplemental expressions of our faith and practice.

ARTICLE 6 – GOVERNANCE

The government of this church will be of the elder type with the authority invested by the church in a board of elders. The goal and desire of the Elder Board is to be in one accord on all issues. However, in recognition of the impossibility of always achieving unanimity, the Board of Elders will work with a simple majority (plus one if number of elders is five or more).

OFFICERS. Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church and He governs His church by His Word through officers whom He appoints. There are two types of officers in the church: elders and deacons.

Pastor (Preaching Elder). The pastor is an elder who is nominated by the Board of Elders and approved by the church. It is his responsibility to feed the flock from God's Word and give leadership to the other elders. The church will have only one pastor with as many associate and/or assistant pastors as the Elders determine necessary.

Elders. Elders must be men who meet the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, and who solemnly and wholeheartedly subscribe to the *1689 London Baptist Confession*. Elders may be added as the Board of Elders deems necessary. However, there must be at least two and no more than seven. There should always be at least as many lay elders as professional elders (pastors).

Deacons. Deacons must be men who meet the qualifications outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13, who solemnly and wholeheartedly subscribe to the *1689 London Baptist Confession*, and have a heart of service in assisting the Elders in meeting the material needs of the congregation. The number of deacons shall not be fixed but determined by the Elders based on the current needs of the congregation.

Appointment of Officers. The appointment of Elders and Deacons is the prerogative of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. He has ordained, however, that each local church exercise the responsibility of recognizing those whom He is appointing to be Elders and Deacons in that particular church. Elders and Deacons are ordained, or appointed, to office by the laying on of hands by the Eldership. This is an expression of approval for which the Elders are responsible. Therefore, each officer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the Eldership in particular. The Lord's appointment of an individual to either of these offices is recognized by means of that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for the particular office and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never be pursued without much prayerful waiting upon God, an honest perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered. Each member of the church has a spiritual responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.

Procedure of Appointment. The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church is executed in three steps: nomination by Elder Board, approval by church and, ordination by laying on of hands.

1. Nomination. Nominations to the office of elder are made by the Eldership. Nominations to the office of deacon are made by the church membership including the eldership according to the needs of the church. The Board of Elders must first consider a member as a candidate for office and discuss his qualifications for the particular office. Upon agreement that the man under consideration is qualified to serve, the elders are to discuss the matter with the candidate, giving him sufficient time to make a prayerful and thoughtful decision. After gaining his assent and his acknowledgment of the responsibility, the Elders must present his nomination to the church for evaluation for a period of three weeks. This gives the individual members of the congregation time to consider the candidate and provide feedback to the Elders. All valid concerns raised by individual members of the congregation will be discussed and resolved with the candidate before proceeding to formal church approval.

2. Approval. Any church meeting for the approval of officers shall be announced on at least three occasions prior to the meeting. The nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. During the discussion the nominee under consideration and members of his immediate family shall leave the presence of the assembly. Concerning the vote, the church should seek unity of mind, but should such unity not be fully realized, no less than three-fourths of those voting shall be required for approval.

3. Ordination. Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside at which time the officer shall be ordained by the laying on of the hands of the Eldership. The special prayers of the whole church should always accompany this solemn act. The laying on of the Elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer-elect.

Tenure of Service.

Elders. All elders (except pastors) shall serve three years from date of election to office. After three years of service, an elder must stand down for nomination and approval.

Deacons. All deacons shall serve three years from date of election to office. After three years of service, a deacon must stand down for nomination and approval.

Chairmanship

Chairman of the Elders. The Pastor or Preaching Elder shall serve as the chairman of the elders. Such chairmanship does not imply greater authority but rather recognizes the Pastor as a first among equals.

Chairman of the Deacons. The elders shall choose a chairman for the deacons.

ARTICLE 7 - MEMBERSHIP

PREREQUISITES FOR MEMBERSHIP

General Requirements. To be eligible for membership, a person must demonstrate repentance toward God and the fruits thereof, as well as that faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ which produces godly works. He must be baptized by immersion after exercising faith in Christ; and to the satisfaction of the Elders express substantial agreement with the purpose (as stated in Article 2), Covenant (as stated in Article 4), Confession (as stated in Article 5), and government of this church (as stated in Article 6). Furthermore, he must not be under the biblically warranted corrective discipline of a genuine church.

Specific Requirements

1. Credible testimony of repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as one's only hope of salvation
2. Belief in every point (as far as one understands) of the *Abstract of Principles*, which is the minimal statement of belief for membership.
3. A completed reading of the *1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith*, informing the elders of any questions or disagreements.
4. A completed reading of the Constitution and a willingness to submit to it.
5. Evidence of good standing with a previous church in case of transfers.
6. In cases of professions of faith in Christ, submit to baptism by immersion at first opportunity.
7. Agreement to make diligent use of the means of Christian growth (see **Conduct Expected of Members**).

RECEPTION INTO MEMBERSHIP

1. **Petition for Membership.** Any person desiring membership must petition the Elders in writing (using the form supplied).
2. **Interview With Elders.** Having reviewed the petition for membership, the Elders will interview the candidate to answer any questions the candidate may have and to ensure that the candidate has a credible profession of faith and is in agreement with the beliefs and practices of the church.
3. **Approval of Congregation.** If the elders are satisfied that the candidate meets all the membership requirements, they will present the candidate to the church for approval. The members of the congregation will have two weeks to voice any concerns or ask any questions concerning the candidate. Such concerns and questions are to be presented to the Elders for consideration. If questions and/or concerns are raised, the candidate will not be received into the membership of the church until the elders are satisfied that the questions and/or concerns are resolved and the candidate is suitable for membership.

TYPES OF MEMBERSHIP

1. **Regular Members.** All who are received into the membership of the church according to the procedures set forth in Article 7, who continue in regular attendance at the stated meetings of the church, and who do not come under the corrective discipline of the church as set forth in Article 8, shall be considered regular members in good standing and entitled to all the rights and privileges of membership in the church (Acts 2:37-47).
2. **Temporary Members.** Persons who come to live in our area for a limited period of time (e.g., students, military personnel, persons on special work assignments) may be received into or removed from the membership of the church on the same basis and in the same manner as persons who have permanent

residence in our area. If such a person is already a member of a church in his place of permanent residence, he need not be released from the membership of his home church, but will be regarded as a temporary member while in our midst, enjoying all the rights and privileges and subject to all the responsibilities, liabilities, and disciplines of regular membership. When such a person terminates his period of temporary residence in good standing he will be released to the fellowship of his home church and no longer be regarded as a member of this church.

CONDUCT EXPECTED OF MEMBERS

1. Growing in Grace. Public and private means of true Christian growth such as consistent attendance at the services of the church, daily intake of the Word of God, personal and family prayer, participation in the Lord's Supper, and honoring the Lord's Day are required of all regular and temporary members of this church unless providentially hindered by illness, unusual working conditions that do not violate the Lord's Day, and other such circumstances.

2. Financial Support. Because it is clearly taught in the Scriptures that Christians should financially support the work of the Lord by systematic, sacrificial, cheerful and proportionate giving through the local church, all the members of this church are expected to conform to this rule of Scripture.

3. Christ-like Attitude. Inasmuch as the church is represented in Scripture as a body having many members, each of the members having its own particular function and yet having a concern for the health and protection of the whole, this church expects that each of its members will strive for the good of the entire body. As members of this church we must actively seek to cultivate acquaintance with one another and maintain mutual transparency and honesty so that we may be better able to pray for one another, love, comfort, and encourage one another; and help one another materially as necessity may require. In addition, we must discreetly confess our faults one to another, faithfully admonish and encourage one another, and refrain from all backbiting and gossip. The Elders may determine that some matters of congregational business are so sensitive that the members may be expected to keep such matters confidential.

4. Support of and Submission to the Leadership. Members will be expected to recognize, support, and submit to the Elders of the church. Supporting God's servants requires praying for them, cultivating personal acquaintances with them, loving and standing by them, and not forsaking them, and defending them rather than prejudicing or damaging their good name. Submitting to God's servants requires imitating their Christian graces, faith and godly principles as they also imitate Christ, receiving their teaching with all readiness of mind and teachableness of spirit, yet with ultimate allegiance to the Word of God, humbly heeding their Scriptural rebukes and warnings as from those appointed to watch for the souls entrusted to them and committed to labor to present them complete and mature in Christ, seeking and carefully considering their counsel as being from those counted faithful by the Lord, and lovingly embracing and abiding by their decisions regarding corporate policy in God's house, which is His church, without creating division even when personally differing from their judgment. This submission will include willingly scheduling pastoral visit with an Elder(s) when requested.

5. Family Life. The church expects its members to obey the teachings of Scripture in respect to the life and government of the home. As the God appointed head of the family, the husband must lead his household with gentleness and love, but also with wisdom and firmness. The wife must submit to her husband in all things according to the rule of Scripture. The husband and wife must bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. This includes setting a godly example before them, consistently instructing them from the Scriptures, and by wise, firm and loving discipline when necessary.

6. Personal Evangelism. It is the duty of every Christian, as an individual and as a member of a local church, to labor by prayer, word, and deed for the extension of the kingdom of God in ever widening circles, beginning at home and stretching forth to the ends of the earth. Therefore, every member of this church is expected prayerfully to recognize and seize every opportunity to bear witness to his faith in Christ, both by consistent Christian conduct and by the testimony of his lips.

7. Christian Liberty. Each member of the church is required to render in his daily life loyal obedience to all the moral precepts established by the Word of God. If God has not condemned or forbidden a practice in His Word, a Christian is at liberty to participate in it. The exercise of Christian liberty, however, must at all times be governed by an earnest desire to walk in the fear of God and to glorify Him in all things, a loving regard for the consciences of weaker brethren, a compassion for the lost, and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul.

TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

Types of Termination

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

2. By Transfer

a. Basis and Procedure for. If a church member in good standing whose conduct does not warrant corrective discipline desires to leave the membership of this church, he is strongly urged to leave in an orderly way by privately indicating that desire to the Elders along with his reasons for leaving. The Elders will provide for a transitional period which will allow the departing member to decide where the letter should be transferred. Such a transitional status will be allowed to continue as long as the departing member maintains regular contact with the Elders, does not unnecessarily prolong the transitional process, and does not engage in conduct requiring the exercise of church discipline.

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

3. By Exclusion If a member ceases to faithfully attend the stated meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if upon relocation ceases to maintain a vital connection with the church, they may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the elders. In such cases, the elders shall try to contact the person to rectify and resolve the situation (Heb 13:17). If these efforts are ineffective, the elders shall inform that person (when possible) and the congregation that they are no longer a member. If a person is not guilty of heresy, scandalous immorality, or divisiveness, either renounces his/her commitment to keep any of the requirements of membership listed in "Conduct Expected of Members," or ceases, without just cause, to practice any of them as a pattern of life, and yet wishes to remain in membership, refusing to resign voluntarily, they may be excluded, but only after repeated admonitions from the elders (2 Tim 2:24-26). In such cases the elders shall announce to the congregation at a stated meeting their intention to exclude the person. Time will be allowed for objections or questions to be raised privately with the elders by any member. If no objection is raised which the elders consider valid, the person will be excluded by action of the elders. The congregation and the person shall be informed of this action.

4. By Resignation. Membership in this church is entered into and initiated jointly, by voluntary commitment from the individual applicant and acceptance by the church. Accordingly, members cannot terminate their membership unilaterally under all circumstances. As a general rule, a member may voluntarily resign from membership in this church. A resignation offered to frustrate or thwart the procedures of corrective discipline is not valid, and the church may proceed with public censure, imposition of strictures, or excommunication in accordance with the procedures outlined in Article 8.

5. By Excommunication. (also see Article 8). According to the teaching of the Bible, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship any person(s) who:

- a. Teaches and/or persistently holds false heretical doctrine.
- b. Blatantly and persistently conducts himself in a way inconsistent with his Christian profession.
- c. Persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church.
- d. Persists in neglecting his membership responsibilities.

RECORDS OF MEMBERSHIP. The Elders shall keep a file of all past and present members. This file shall have three divisions: regular members, temporary members, and former members. The file of former members shall include a date and reason church membership was terminated, as well as any other necessary information.

ARTICLE 8 - CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Also see Appendix B

FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE. Every disciple of Christ is disciplined by Him personally and without intervening mediators, and immediately, through the church (Matt. 18:15-20; I Thess. 5:12-15; Heb. 3:12-13; 10:24-25). Mutual submission to one another and to the elders whom the Lord has set over His church (I Pet. 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when formative discipline alone is insufficient and corrective discipline becomes necessary.

CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE

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

ARTICLE 9 - ORDINANCES

GENERAL STATEMENT. There are two ordinances of special significance that our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely, baptism and the Lords Supper. Neither of them has saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of baptism or through the bread and the cup of the supper. These ordinances are not means of "special grace," but they are special "means of grace" and powerful aids to the faith of the believers who participate in them.

BAPTISM

1. Its Candidates. Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for baptism, and all such persons should be baptized and joined to the church.

2. Its Necessity for Membership. Believing that baptism in water is the God-ordained sign of one's personal union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, and the door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, we shall receive into the membership of the church only those who have been baptized as believers "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit".

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

THE LORD'S SUPPER Whereas baptism is the initiatory ordinance by which one enters the visible church, and should be observed only once by each believer, the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently by the assembled church. While this is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity, the bread and the cup of the supper are and remain only symbols of the broken body and the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to maintain the purity of this ordinance, the Elders will faithfully seek to insure that only true believers are admitted to the table.

ARTICLE 10 - ORGANIZATIONS AND TASK GROUPS

Organizations and task groups may be formed to help carry out the work of the ministry of the church as needed. These will be formed and members appointed by the elders and shall be accountable to the elders.

ARTICLE 11 - LEGAL OFFICERS

PURPOSE. In order to comply with Georgia State law governing nonprofit organizations, this church shall have such officers as the law requires to represent the church before the state.

QUALIFICATIONS. Legal officers shall be regular members in good standing.

AUTHORITY. Legal officers operate under the authority of the Elders (or their designates). Since their office is not Biblically mandated, they have no role in governing the affairs of this church.

APPOINTMENT. Appointment of legal officers shall be the responsibility of the Elders. The duration of their term of office shall be for one year, but may be renewed indefinitely.

ARTICLE 12 - CHURCH BUSINESS MEETINGS

GENERAL STATEMENT. The Elders shall call all congregational meetings. There shall be a business meeting of the church held in on a Sunday in December for the hearing of reports, the adoption of a budget, and the transaction of other business which the Elders bring before the church. A second meeting shall be held on a Sunday in June for the approval of officers, making any necessary adjustments to the budget and other business that the elders bring before the church. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the Elders.

NOTICE OF MEETINGS. Notice of all congregational meetings in which business is to be transacted shall be announced on at least three public occasions prior to the meeting. Other business meetings at which there is no business transacted by vote may be called at the discretion of the Elders without such notice.

QUORUM. The regular and temporary members present at any properly convened congregational meeting shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

CHAIRMANSHIP. The Chairman of the Elders, or his appointee, shall preside at all business meetings.

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

ARTICLE 13 - CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY

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

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

obligated to communicate this together with the reason(s) for their conclusion to the church within one month at a duly called meeting of the church. Furthermore, relevant amendments to this Constitution must be submitted to the church and acted upon in accordance with the provisions of Article 12 within one year following this informational meeting,

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



APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTION

The following paragraphs are a summary of what we believe to be our covenant responsibilities toward God and toward one another. This summary forms the basis for our giving and receiving instruction for ourselves and for our families.

SUMMARY OF OUR COVENANT RESPONSIBILITIES (THE LAWS WRITTEN IN OUR HEARTS)

1. We agree to worship only the one true and living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, who has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. We will declare His glory to the nations. We will have no other gods before Him.
2. We agree to worship God in His appointed way and to exclude from our worship anything that He has not appointed.
3. We agree not to use the name of our God emptily or to take it upon ourselves carelessly, but to walk in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.
4. We agree to cease from our own works on the Lord's Day, if they are not works of piety, or necessity, and to positively sanctify the day by special exercises of public and private worship.
5. We agree to honor and obey, within the bounds of Scripture, all our superiors, whether in family, church, state, or business; and, if we be superiors, to deal reasonably and lovingly with our subordinates and thus to teach them by word and example to fear God and keep His commandments.
6. We agree to avoid whatever tends to destroy us or our neighbors and to engage vigorously in all lawful endeavors to preserve our own lives and the lives of others, especially by ready reconciliation and faithful exhortation in the church.
7. We agree to possess our bodies in holiness as vessels joined to Christ and indwelt by the Holy Spirit and to avoid all uncleanness of thought, speech, or action.
8. We agree to be diligent in our vocations, that we may provide for our own households, avoid theft of time, money, or goods, and that we may have to give to him who has need.
9. We agree to earnestly promote truth among men and to avoid anything that would prejudice the truth or injure our neighbor's good name.
10. We agree to be fully content with our own condition in life, to rejoice in the advancement of our neighbor, and to avoid envying him or coveting anything that is his.

APPENDIX B

Church Discipline Procedures

Public Reproof or Censure. Public reproof consists of a pastoral effort, before the gathered church, to call an impenitent church member to repentance for sin too serious to be covered with a blanket of love; or to deal with serious sin even where there may have been repentance. The Elders may administer public censure whenever, in their judgment either public misconduct, patterns of sin, or serious doctrinal error pose a significant threat to the godliness, unity or testimony of the congregation. Those who humbly receive the word of public reproof, own and confess their sin, and manifest a transformed life shall afterward be publicly commended for their godly repentance. If the reproof is not heeded, further discipline may be imposed.

Suspension of Privileges. Some misconduct on the part of a member is so detrimental to the unity, holiness and testimony of the church that the Lord required public reproof to be accompanied with the suspension of some of the privileges of membership according to the nature and gravity of the offense. In all cases of suspension the offending person is still regarded as a brother in Christ and as a member of the church. Severe reproof is to be expressed and the suspension is to be enforced by the entire church, and not merely by the Elders representing the church. Therefore, when appropriate, the Elders shall, at a duly convened business meeting of the church, inform the church of the member's suspension. The Elders shall specify the grounds of the discipline, the privileges to be revoked, and the stricture to be imposed. In the interest of maintaining a climate of holiness and peace, the Elders shall have the right at their sole discretion, to impose a temporary suspension upon a member during the brief interval between their determination to suspend the member and formal notification of the church. A member under suspension shall be treated by the congregation according to the specific applications of the general principle of social avoidance determined by the Elders. Those who humbly submit to the imposed discipline shall afterwards be forgiven, have their privileges restored, and be publicly received back into the full fellowship of the church. The general categories of sin which require suspension are as follows:

1. A Stubborn Private Offender. When a private offense remains unresolved even after the method prescribed by our Lord in Matt. 18:15-16 has been graciously and prayerfully followed, it is considered an aggravated offense. The brethren involved shall bring the matter to the Elders who, if they judge the matter to be serious and cannot persuade the brother to repent, shall suspend the brother and report the situation to the church. If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains adamant in his sin, he may be excommunicated.

2. Divisive Teachings or Behavior. When a member deliberately persists in the propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to the Scripture or our Confession, or attempts to sow discord among the membership contrary to the Scripture or this Constitution, he may be suspended as a factious man. Since every member is responsible to help preserve the unity of the Spirit, no one is to conceal such divisive behavior, but rather to reprove it, and disclose it to the Elders. Whenever the Elders become aware of such divisive behavior, they are to confront it meekly and patiently according to the Word of God. If, even after receiving repeated admonition from the Elders, a member persists in such behavior, the Elders shall suspend the divisive brother and report the situation to the church. If, even after a period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, he may be excommunicated.

3. Disorderly Behavior. Some kinds of conduct and doctrine are categorized as disorderly. If a member deliberately persists in conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for the order appointed by God for all mankind in the creation ordinances, namely: work, Sabbath and marriage, he may be suspended as a disorderly man. Similarly, a member may be suspended as a disorderly man if he deliberately persists in conduct contrary to the order established by Christ for His church in Scripture as recognized by our church in this Constitution. Whenever the Elders become aware that in spite of the admonitions of formative discipline a member is behaving disorderly, they are to confront him meekly and patiently according to the Word of God. Disorderly conduct is to be distinguished from traitorous conduct. A disorderly member is not immediately to be excommunicated. Rather he is to be suspended in accordance with the directions of II Thess. 3:6-15 and not regarded as an enemy but admonished as a brother. However, if even after receiving such admonition from the Elders, a member persists in this behavior, the Elders shall suspend the disorderly brother and report the situation to the church. If, even after the period of suspension, the person remains impenitent, he may be excommunicated.

4. A Scandalous Sin. If a member has sinned scandalously but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the Elders, excommunication would be unwarranted. However, it may still be prudent to suspend him for a time so that he may realize the gravity of the offense and clearly manifest

repentance so that reproach not be brought upon the Name of Christ and the church, and so that others may not be emboldened to sin. If fruits worthy of repentance are not forthcoming, the Elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated.

5. Contempt of Church Discipline. If a person is accused or suspected of an offense requiring corrective discipline, yet absents himself from the meetings of the church, or refuses to meet with the Elders so that the matter may be investigated, such a person may be suspended. The Elders may recommend to the church at a later date that this person be excommunicated.

Excommunication

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

Church Affirmation. To be valid, an act of excommunication must be affirmed by the church at a duly convened business meeting where the elders present the necessary facts of the case and seek church affirmation. The accused member and other members of the congregation will be given the opportunity to publicly state any biblical reasons why the accused member should not be excommunicated. If the elders determine that no biblical reasons have been given, it will be assumed that the church has affirmed the elders' decision and will be expected to uphold its biblical responsibilities in the execution of discipline. If, however, the elders determine that biblical reasons have been given and that these reasons require further investigation, the elders are to reconsider the case, and in one week report back to the congregation with their recommendation.

Restoration. The purposes of church discipline are to restore a fallen brother or sister and to keep the church pure. Therefore, it is the duty of the church to forgive and to restore to full membership a suspended or excommunicated member who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance. This shall be done in a duly convened business meeting of the church.