

# Constitution of Sycamore Baptist Church East Moline, Illinois

## ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this church shall be the Sycamore Baptist Church of East Moline, Illinois.

## ARTICLE II - AFFILIATION

Section 1. We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the head of the Church and who directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of the Holy Scripture. The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities stand under the authority of the Holy Scripture.

Section 2. The church may and does cooperate with other like minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern. We may seek the assistance and counsel of these 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.

## ARTICLE III - PURPOSE

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints. Therefore we are committed to the proclamation of God's perfect Law and the glorious Gospel of his grace through all the world and to the defense of "the faith once delivered unto the saints". (Jude 3)

## ARTICLE IV - ARTICLES OF FAITH

We adopt as the fullest expression of our faith the London 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 an assistance in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness.

## ARTICLE V - MEMBERSHIP

Section 1. Requirements for membership. Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who can attest to a transformed life, who has been baptized upon the profession of his faith, who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines and aims of this church, and who is willing to submit to its government shall be eligible for membership in it.

### Section 2. Procedure in the Reception of New Members

Paragraph A. A person who desires to become a member of the church shall apply to the elders and request to be interviewed by them. During the interview the elders will seek to determine whether that person has a credible profession of faith in Christ, has been scripturally baptized, is in substantial agreement with the doctrines of the church, and intends to give wholehearted support to its ministry and to its discipline and government.

Paragraph B. If the applicant is or has been a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine the person's standing in that church and his reason for leaving. At the discretion of the elders, a letter of inquiry concerning the person's standing may be sent to that church before his acceptance as a member in this church is determined.

Paragraph C. If the elders are satisfied that the applicant meets the requirements for membership, they shall announce the same to the congregation at a stated meeting of the church. At least seven days will be allowed for objections or questions to be raised by any member concerning the applicant's manner of life or doctrine. If no objection is raised which the elders consider to be valid, the person will be publicly received into the membership at a stated meeting of the church. The elders shall postpone the reception of a person into membership until proper investigation can be made concerning objections which in their judgment are sufficiently serious.

### Section 3. Termination of Membership

Paragraph A. By Physical Death. When a member of this church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall be automatically removed from the membership roll.

Paragraph B. If the member shall desire to unite with another church, his membership in this church shall be terminated at the discretion of the elders.

Paragraph C. By Exclusion. If a member habitually absences himself from the stated meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if due to relocation he ceases to maintain a vital contact with the church, he may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the elders. Also, any member who personally so requests may after due admonition be excluded from the membership. In such cases no congregational approval of the action shall be needed: the elders shall simply announce to the congregation that such a person is no longer a member. (Heb. 10:24-25, Acts 2:42-47)

Paragraph D. By Excommunication. According to the teaching of the Holy Scripture, a congregation must cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false and heretical doctrine or who blatantly and persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church. The procedure to be followed is set forth in Article VI of this constitution. (I Cor. 5, Matt. 18:15-18)

### Section 4. Conduct of Members

Paragraph A. It is the duty of all members to attend all the stated meetings of the church unless providentially hindered by such matters as illness, accident, or unusual working conditions. The stated meetings of the church are all the services on the Lord's Day, the midweek prayer service, the business meetings of the congregation, and any special meetings which the elders shall occasionally deem it necessary to call. (Heb. 10:24,25)

Paragraph B. The church expects all members to make use of the various means of grace which are available to them, such as the regular daily reading of the Bible, regular private and family prayer, and a proper reverence for and observance of the Lord's Day.

Paragraph C. It is the duty of Christians to support financially the work of the Lord by systematic and proportionate giving made through the local church, all the members of this church are expected to confirm this rule of Scripture. (II Corinthians 8,9)

Paragraph D. It is the duty of members to obey the teachings of the Scriptures in respect to family life and government. The Scripture clearly prohibits the believer from marrying an unbeliever, and such relationships are not to be encouraged in any way. As the God-appointed head of the family, the husband must rule over the household with gentleness and love, but also with wisdom and firmness. The wife must be in subjection to her husband in all things according to the rule of Scripture. The husband and wife must "bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord" by setting a godly example before them, by instructing them consistently in the Scriptures, and by wise and firm discipline, including corporal punishment when it is needed. (Eph. 5:22-6:4, Prov. 22:6)

Paragraph E. It is the duty of every Christian individually and as a member of a local church to labor for the extension of the Kingdom of God both at home and to the ends of the earth. Therefore, every member of this church is expected prayerfully to recognize and to seize every opportunity to bear testimony of his conversion. (Matt. 28:19-20)

Paragraph F. It is the duty of each member of the church to render in his daily life loyal obedience to all the moral precepts established in the Word of God (Romans 8:3-4). 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 conscience of weaker brethren, a compassion for the lost, and a zealous regard for the health of one's own soul and body (Romans 13:14, I Cor. 9:24-27, Gal. 5:22-23, I Peter 2:16).

Paragraph G. It is the duty of all who come into membership of this church to recognize and submit to the authority of the elders of the church (I Cor. 16:15-16, I Thess. 5:12-13, Heb. 13:17).

Paragraph H. It is the duty of all members to be kind, compassionate and forgiving to one another while consciously putting away all bitterness and anger. Each one should look not only on his own interests but also the interests of the others. This love should be manifested by deeds, not just words. (Eph. 4:31-32, Phil. 2:1-5, I John 3:11-18)

## ARTICLE VI - CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Section 1. Formative Discipline. Every disciple of Christ must be under his discipline (his instruction and correction), which is administered to each one through the church, according to I Cor. 12:12-27 and other passages. Mutual submission to one another and to the elders whom the Lord has set over his church (Eph. 5:21, I Peter 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 failure in the application of this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

### Section 2. Corrective Discipline

Paragraph A. General Statement. Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In all such cases reasonable efforts must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Gal. 6:1, James 5:19-20, Matt. 18:15-17). The principles given to us in Matthew 18:15-16 and I Corinthians 5:1-13 must be carefully followed in all cases of corrective discipline. When admonition is not heeded, one of the following forms of corrective discipline may need to be applied.

#### Paragraph B. Suspension

(1) Any conduct on the part of a member which disturbs the peace of the church or prejudices its testimony may require that the offending brother or sister be debarred by action of the elders from participating in certain activities of the church according to the gravity of the offense. A suspension shall be announced to the congregation by the elders and shall remain in force until the suspended member gives evidence of true repentance and change of conduct. When a suspended member can be restored to full fellowship, this also shall be announced to the congregation by the elders. While a member is under such discipline, he shall be treated by the congregation according to the directions given in II Thess. 3:6-15. Although such a person is considered to be walking disorderly, he must still be regarded as a member and not as one cut off from the church.

(2) If a member has sinned publicly but shows no hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the admonition of the elders, it may still be necessary to suspend him for a time from some of the privileges of membership lest reproach be brought upon the church, lest others be emboldened to sin, and lest the offender himself fail to test his own soul and realize the gravity of his offense. Those who humbly submit to the imposed discipline shall afterwards be wholly forgiven and publicly received back into the full fellowship of the church.

(3) In case where a person is accused or suspended of gross sin and absence himself from the congregation, refusing to meet with the elders that the matter may be investigated, the elders shall announce to the congregation that the person is suspended from the membership, and such suspension shall continue in the force as long as the conditions giving rise to it continue.

#### Paragraph C. Excommunication

(1) Some types of conduct must be categorized as "immoral" (I Cor. 5:9-11, 6:9-10), and a member guilty of such conduct must be cut off from the fellowship of the church (I Cor. 5:3-5, Matt. 18:17). In such a case the elders shall make earnest efforts to bring the offender to true repentance and reformation, but if these efforts fail, the elders shall report the same to the congregation at the regular or specially called business meeting of the church and recommend that the offender be excommunicated, which must be done, according to the Scripture (Matt. 18:17, I Cor. 5:13), by action of the entire church. To be valid, an act of excommunication must have approval of at least two-thirds of the members present and voting.

(2) Likewise, some wrong opinions regarding the doctrines of Scripture are so serious that they must be categorized as "heretical" (Gal. 1:6-9, I Tim. 4:1), and a member who persists in propagating or holding

any opinions which contradict the church's confession of faith, in spite of earnest and patient admonition by the elders, shall be excommunicated in the same manner as an immoral person.

Section 3. Restoration. It is the duty of the church to forgive and restore to full membership a disciplined person who gives satisfactorily evidence of his repentance and reformation (II Cor. 2:6-8). This shall be done, on the recommendation of the elders, in a duly convened business meeting of the church by at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. The elders by their own action may restore to full membership privileges a person who they have suspended (Paragraph B of Section 2 of this Article) and shall report the same to the congregation.

## ARTICLE VII - BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Section 1. There are two sacraments of special significance which our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. (I Cor. 11:23-26, Matt. 28:18-20)

Section 2. 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 (I Cor. 11:26). This is the most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity.

## ARTICLE VIII - OFFICE BEARERS

Section 1. General Statement. Jesus Christ alone is head of the Church, and He governs His church through office-bearers whom He appoints and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Office-bearers in the church are of two kinds, elders (also called "bishops" and "pastors") and deacons. It is the duty of the church to seek to discover among its members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for office-bearers, and after formally recognizing such by common suffrage, to set them apart by united prayer, and then to submit to their authority.

### Section 2. Elders

Paragraph A. The Scriptures indicate that normally there should be a plurality of elders in the local church. These are also called "bishops" (meaning overseers) because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly. They are the "pastors and teachers" given to the church "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-12, Acts 14:23).

Paragraph B. In view of the fact that the responsibilities of this office are numerous and grave, it is highly desirable that at least one elder should devote his full time to the work of the ministry and the oversight of the church. Such elders are usually referred to as "pastors", not to the exclusion of the others, for they all share the pastoral responsibility, but because they "labor in the Word and in teaching" (I Tim. 5:17). The church is responsible to give adequate financial support to such men and it is free to invite men from outside the local congregation to come into its midst and serve in this capacity. Any man thus called to this office must be able conscientiously to affirm his agreement with the Articles of Faith and the Constitution of the church. Should he at any time move from this position, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this fact known to the church.

Paragraph C. Elders are responsible for the oversight of the church including but not limited to the following: finances, doctrine, programs, discipline and the spiritual welfare of the church's members. While every elder should be able to teach, some will be engaged in formal and public teaching while others will be more engaged in private teaching and admonishing and governing. Gifted men who are not recognized as elders may engage in public teaching and preaching, provided they are godly in character, but the exercise of their gifts must be under the direction and control of the elders. (Tim. 5:17, Heb. 13:17, Titus 3:10,11)

Paragraph D. The elders have the right to appoint all committees and directors of church groups at their discretion, for the orderly functioning of the church. These in turn shall be responsible to the elders.

Paragraph E. While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder as an individual is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church.

Paragraph F. The church should endeavor to discover and then formally recognize all the men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite gifts and graces and has set over the church, but only such men. Thus when men have been ordained this office, the church will have the confidence that it has recognized the overseers whom the Holy Spirit has set over it. It is evident, therefore, that neither the number of elders nor the length of their term of office can be fixed by the church.

Paragraph G. The qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of elder are clearly set forth in Scripture, particularly in I Tim. 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

### Section 3. Deacons

Paragraph A. At the request of the elders the deacons shall administer any church program or give themselves to any work which will free the elders for their primary ministry of teaching the Word and prayer. Examples of such work include but are not limited to: business affairs of the church, benevolent concerns of the church, treasurer, clerk, missions, maintaining the church membership roll, etc. All these duties must be fulfilled in cooperation with and in subjection to the elders.

Paragraph B. The number of deacons nor their term of office shall be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having the scriptural qualifications for that office.

Paragraph C. The qualifications for the men chosen to fulfill the office of deacon are particularly set forth in Acts 6: 3 and I Tim. 3: 8-13.

### Section 4. Appointment and Removal of Office-Bearers

Paragraph A. The local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through its elders, is responsible to appoint men to the office of elder and deacon. Each individual involved should have an inward conviction that the Lord is calling him to the particular work, and the church should recognize that call as it observes it the individual evidence of the gifts and graces which Scripture requires for the particular office. This is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayerful waiting on God for guidance, a careful examination of the relevant passages of Scripture, and a dispassionate evaluation of each man nominated to a particular office. These activities are the responsibility of each individual member of the church as well as the church as a whole.

Paragraph B. Nominations to the office of elder and deacon shall be made by a nominating committee consisting of the elders, deacons and at the discretion of the elders members of the congregation at large. In accordance with Acts 6, the committee shall ask the congregation's help in seeking out Scripturally qualified men for these offices. After careful consideration of all the potential office-bearers, this committee shall place in nomination as many or as few men as it sees fit. The elders alone may at any time during the year nominate a candidate or candidates to either or both offices and call a special congregational business meeting for their consideration. In no case may a man be nominated to either office without his knowledge and prior consent.

Paragraph C. When the time comes to consider a nomination during a business meeting of the church, the candidate for office and any members of his immediate family who are present shall be requested to leave the room while his qualifications are openly discussed by the entire congregation in the fear of God and in the light of the Scripture. After that a written ballot shall be taken. Ideally, the vote of the congregation will in such matters be unanimous, but if unanimity is not realized, no less than three-fourths majority of the members present and voting shall be required for the election of an office-bearer.

Paragraph D. Following the recognition of an office-bearer by vote of the congregation, he shall be publicly installed in his office at a regular worship service by the prayer of the whole church and the laying on of the hands of the existing elders. (Acts 6, I Tim. 5:22)

Paragraph E. Office-bearers are subject to the same rules of discipline as are members of the church. They shall hold office as long as they are faithful to their calling and have the confidence of the congregation. An officer may, however, resign his office without prejudice if for good and valid reasons he finds he is no longer able to discharge the duties of it.

Paragraph F. Elders and deacons shall be removed from office when under church discipline as outlined in Article VI, Section 2.

Paragraph G. The calling of a pastor. Whenever the pastoral office becomes vacant a pulpit committee shall be formed composed of the elders and deacons. The pulpit committee will then be responsible for seeking candidates for the pastorate and will recommend its choice to the congregation. Prospective candidates shall be presented to the congregation one at a time, the church body voting on one candidate before another can be presented by the pulpit committee. A candidate must obtain at least a three-fourths majority of those present and voting before the church extends an invitation for him to become its pastor. The voting shall be by ballot.

The pastoral ministry may be terminated by the pastor's resignation, upon not less than thirty days notice. Should it become necessary to dismiss a pastor, he shall be given at least sixty days notice of the termination with salary, whether or not he continues to discharge the duties of his office during that period.

A pastor under church discipline shall be removed from his office as outlined in Article VI, Section 2.

## ARTICLE IX - CONGREGATIONAL BUSINESS MEETINGS

Section 1. General Statement. There shall be an annual business meeting of the church for the hearing of reports, the election of officers, and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the meeting. This shall be held the second Wednesday in July. Special business meetings may be called at other times at the discretion of the elders. Parliamentary procedure as outlined by either Robert's Rules or Sturgis shall be followed in the conducting of the business meeting of the church.

### Section 2. Notice of Meetings

Paragraph A. Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at regular services on two successive Lord's Days immediately prior to the meetings. However, in the case of emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each regular member of the time, place and purpose of the meeting.

Paragraph B. Meetings for the hearing of special reports or for seeking the counsel of the congregation may be called on shorter notice, but no vote may be taken or other business transacted at such meetings.

Paragraph C. The elders shall regularly keep the congregation informed of all matters of concern to the church at either the stated services of the church or at specially called meetings.

Section 3. Voting. All regular members who have reached the age of sixteen years and are in good standing in the church may vote on any church question properly brought before the congregation.

Section 4. Quorum. The regular members present at any properly convened congregational meeting shall, at the discretion of the elders, constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

Section 5. Chairmanship. The pastor shall preside at all business meetings, but in the case of his absence or inability to serve another elder shall preside. In the event that there are no elders, a designated deacon shall preside.

ARTICLE X - AMENDMENTS This constitution may be amended at any regular business meeting, by the vote of two-thirds majority of the active members voting, providing public notice of the same shall have been given one month previous to the meeting, including one public notice in writing in the church bulletin.

ARTICLE XI - All previous bylaws and resolutions are hereby repealed and made null and void.