



2023 CONSTITUTION & BY-LAW RECOMMENDATION PACKET

PART ONE.....Elder Letter & Timeline

PART TWO.....Summary & Rationale

PART THREE.....Grouped Recommendations

PART FOUR.....Constitution & By-Laws with Changes

PART FIVE.....Recommended Resources

August 20, 2023

Church Family,

Over the past several months, our elders have been discussing some significant changes to how we admit and dismiss members and the office and function of elders and deacons. Many of these discussions were influenced by what we heard from you during last year's Equip cycle on the Church. We have prayerfully and carefully crafted changes to our constitution and by-laws that we believe are both biblical and in the best interest of our church's mission to make disciples.

We recognize that what we present to you in this packet may initially seem overwhelming. There are four multi-faceted recommendations contained within. It will take some time to properly consider these changes as a church family. After tonight's initial elder presentation, the next step is for you to prayerfully and carefully consider these recommendations. Keep in mind these are only recommendations. Our elder council has worked long and hard in bringing these to you, but decisions such as these must ultimately be made by our congregation together.

As you will see on the next page, over the coming months, we will have numerous opportunities for you to ask questions and discuss these recommendations. In the meantime, we ask that you study this information and commit to diligent prayer for our church to make good decisions together as we seek the will of Christ, our Chief Shepherd, for this local church.

In Love,

NRBC Elder Council

Presentation & Discussion Timeline

Q& A Sessions

Sunday, September 17
3rd Sunday Service

Wednesday, October 18
Equip Break Gathering

Upon Request Between September 1 & November 19
Small Group Sessions with Available Elder

Sermons

Sunday, October 29
Membership Matters

Sunday, November 5
Leadership Matters

Motions & Discussion

Sunday, November 19
Annual Members' Meeting

Church Vote

TBD
Special Called Members' Meeting

PART TWO

SUMMARY & RATIONALE

Summary & Rationale

Recommendation One Summary

- Recommends minor corrections to the Constitution and By-Laws for the sake of clarity and consistency in footnotes, administrative offices, and the logistics of members' meetings.

Recommendation One Rationale

- The constitution and by-laws of our Church should be regularly evaluated and updated for clarity and consistency to best reflect the beliefs and operations of the Church.

Recommendation Two Summary

- Recommends changes to the process of membership in the following way
 - Clarifies that the evaluation of both testimonies of faith and the fruit of conversion is part of the membership process.
 - Allows all members to vote in members' meetings, removing the age restriction in all cases other than matters of sensitive church discipline at the discretion of the elders.
 - Moves voting on candidates for membership out of the Sunday morning service and into members' meetings.
 - Requires a vote of the membership for all membership terminations.

Recommendation Two Rationale

- We believe that earthly authority to admit and dismiss members of the congregation is vested in the membership of the local church (Matt 16, 18).

- Our current system of admitting members into the congregation fails to provide adequate information concerning the candidate to the congregation prior to acceptance into membership.
- Our current system of admitting members into the congregations fails to provide an opportunity to vote, in any real way, on each candidate.
- Our bylaws fail to properly consider the congregation's necessary role in member transfers and/or resignation.
- Our current policy of allowing members to unilaterally terminate their membership shortcuts the church discipline process (Matthew 18).

Recommendation Three Summary

- Recommends changes to the office and function of Elder in the following ways
 - Clearly states that only biblically qualified men can be elders.
 - Provides for 3-year term limits for lay elders and requires at least a 6-month respite after serving two consecutive terms. Lay elders would be re-elected by the congregation every term.
 - Clarifies the responsibilities of the elder council.
 - Changes the required proportion of non-vocational elders to vocational elders from more than half to half.
 - Clarifies who is and who is not considered ordained by the church.

Recommendation Three Rationale

- In light of current discussions within the Southern Baptist Convention, it is important for our Church to make clear our belief that the office of pastor/elder is reserved for biblically qualified men.
- Setting term limits for lay elders lessens the perceived commitment for men considering serving in the office.

- Requiring a respite after serving two terms as an elder protects leaders from burnout, emphasizes the need for rest, and encourages other biblically qualified men to serve in the office.
- Requiring more than half of the elder council to be nonvocational elders may lead to our inability to have a plurality of elders in the event that only one man is serving as an elder.
- The church needs an established practice for ordination.

Recommendation Four Summary

- Recommends changes to the office and function of Deacon in the following ways
 - States that biblically qualified men and women can serve as deacons
 - Clarifies that deacons lead ministries that meet tangible, organizational, and mercy needs of the church.
 - Provides for 2-year term limits for deacons and requires at least a 6-month respite after serving three consecutive teams. Deacons would be re-elected by the congregation every term.

Recommendation Four Rationale

- Setting term limits for deacons lessens the perceived commitment for candidates considering serving in the office.
- Requiring a respite after serving three terms as a deacon protects leaders from burnout, emphasizes the need for rest, and encourages other biblically qualified men and women to serve in the office.
- We need additional clarity in our official documents concerning the function of deacons.
- Since deacons do not exercise teaching or spiritual authority at NRBC, there is no biblical prohibition to women serving in the office.

PART THREE

GROUPED RECOMMENDATIONS

2023 Constitution & By-Law Recommendations

Existing Language

~~Deleted Language~~

Additional Language

Additional Language in Seperate Recommendation

Recommendation #1 – Clarity & Consistency

Recommendation 1a- Constitution, Article III: Articles of Faith (footnote) & By-Laws, A. Membership, Section 2- Admission of Members (footnote)

~~"The Baptist Faith and Message states, "Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons." The Church understands "pastors" and "elders" are synonymous.~~

Recommendation 1b- Constitution, Article VI: Membership (footnote)

See ~~Constitution and~~ By-Laws Appendix 1

Recommendation 1c- Constitution, Article VIII: Articles of Faith

The administrative positions under this Constitution are Clerk and Treasurer, ~~and Financial Secretary.~~

Recommendation 1d- By-Laws, C Meetings, Section 2- Members' Meetings

An Elder designated by the Council of Elders shall preside as moderator at all Members' meetings of the Church. The Elders shall see that the stated meetings of the Church are regularly held and that required reports are submitted to the Church ~~by the responsible members or ministry team leaders.~~

The ~~designated secretary of the Council of Elders~~ moderator shall determine if the requirements of a quorum are met for all Members' Meetings. The Clerk shall record the minutes. In the absence of the Clerk for any Members' Meeting, the Council of Elders shall appoint a member to perform the duties of the Clerk. Meeting minutes shall be made available to the congregation prior to the following regularly scheduled Members' Meeting.

Meetings shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order, unless these By-Laws specify otherwise.

~~Meeting minutes shall be made available to the congregation within 30 days.~~

Recommendation #2 – Membership

The elder council recommends making the following changes to our constitution and by-law that pertain to church membership.

Recommendation 2a- Constitution, Article VI: Membership & By-Laws, A. Membership, Section 1- Qualifications

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized upon profession of their faith, who bears the fruit of conversion, who has read and expresses agreement with the Church Covenant,¹ and who is willing to submit themselves for consideration for membership according to the Constitution and By-Laws of this Church shall be eligible for membership.

Recommendation 2b- By Laws, A. Membership, Section 2- Admission of Members

~~The Elders shall be responsible for determining each person's qualification for membership. Before acceptance into Church covenant membership the applicant shall attend a New Members Class in order that the Elders may ascertain his or her Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and serious intent to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this Church.~~

The Elders shall be responsible for evaluating each person's qualification for membership. Before being presented to the Church for covenant membership, the applicant shall attend a New Members Class in order to learn about the church's doctrines, practices, and responsibilities of membership. Upon completion of the New Members Class, the applicant shall meet with an Elder in order that he may ascertain the applicant's Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, agreement with the Church Covenant, and serious intent to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this Church.

To be admitted into ~~Church~~ covenant membership, applicants shall be presented by the Elders for admission and accepted by vote of the members at any ~~regular Sunday worship service~~ Members' Meeting. The congregation shall then receive the applicant into membership by a three-fourths majority vote.

Recommendation 2c- By Laws, A. Membership, Section 3- Duties and Privileges of Membership

In accord with the duties enumerated in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the

¹ See Constitution and By-Laws Appendix 1

each has received from God. Only members shall be eligible to serve as officers or ministry team leaders. Non-members are eligible to serve on ministry teams. Additionally, non-members may serve the Church for purposes of support and professional consultation. (footnote addition) It is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all Members' Meetings and vote on the election of officers, on decisions regarding membership status and on such other matters as may be submitted to a vote. All persons who are accepted as members, shall be entitled to vote in person ~~(but not by proxy) provided the member is 16 years of age or older.~~ Proxy voting is not allowed. At the discretion of the Elders, votes concerning sensitive matters of church discipline may be limited to members 18 years of age and older.

Footnote: See Article VI of the Constitution

Recommendation 2d- By Laws, A. Membership, Section 5- Membership Termination

~~Membership may be terminated by any of the following actions:~~

Membership shall only be terminated by vote of the Church. An individual's membership may be terminated by vote of the members present at any Members' Meeting for the following reasons:

- a) Voluntary request for his or her membership to be rescinded,
- b) Transfer request by letter from another gospel-preaching church,
- c) As an act of Church discipline at the recommendation of the Elders and by a two-thirds majority vote ~~of the members present at any Members' Meeting,~~
- d) Willful negligence of the duties and privileges of membership as outlined in A. Section ~~3, for more than a year,~~ upon the recommendation of the Elders, ~~at the Annual Members' Meeting by a two-thirds majority vote.~~

Recommendation 2e- By Laws, A. Membership, Section 5- Membership Termination.

a) & d)

- a) Accept members into the Church,

Footnote: ~~Members may also be voted upon at any Sunday worship service.~~

d) ~~Terminate members as outlined in A. Section 5c and 5d~~ Terminate an individual's membership in the Church

Recommendation #3 – Elders

The elder council recommends making the following changes to our constitution and by-laws that pertain to the office of Elder.

Recommendation 3a- Constitution, Article VII: Officers (footnote- part a)

The office of Elder shall only be filled by biblically qualified men.

Recommendation 3b- By-Laws, D. Officers, Section 2- Elders, Paragraph 4

The Church shall elect Elders, gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with E. Section 2 of these By-Laws. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His Church. Lay Elders shall be reelected by the Church triennially. After a Lay Elder has served two consecutive three-year terms, he may only be reelected to the office of Elder after a respite. The respite shall be for a minimum of 6 months.

Recommendation 3c- By-Laws, D. Officers, Section 2 Elders- Paragraph 7

The Council of Elders will be responsible for oversight of the ministry and resources of the Church. A majority of the Council shall be composed of Lay Elders not in the regular pay of the Church At least half of the Council shall be composed of Lay Elders, and no Elder shall hold the office of Deacon.

Recommendation 3d- By-Laws, D. Officers, Section 2 Elders- Paragraph 8

The Council of Elders shall take responsibility to perform the following functions:

- a) Examine, ~~and~~ instruct, and present prospective members to the Church for consideration for membership
- b) Examine and present candidates for the offices of Elder and Deacon to the Church for consideration in accordance with E. Sections 1 and 2 of these By-Laws.
- c) Appoint ministry team leaders, as needed, to assist them with carrying out the mission and vision of the Church.
- ~~b) d)~~ d) Oversee the work of the Deacons, Church administrative positions and ministry teams
- ~~e) e)~~ e) Oversee worship services
- ~~d) f)~~ f) Oversee the administration of ~~administer~~ the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper
- ~~e) g)~~ g) Equip the membership for the work of the ministry

- f) ~~h)~~ Encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error
- g) ~~i)~~ Oversee the process of Church discipline
- ~~h) ~~j)~~ Approve membership letters of transfer~~ Present individuals to the Church for termination of membership
- ~~i) ~~k)~~ Coordinate and promote the ministries of the Church~~
- ~~j) ~~l)~~ Mobilize the Church for world missions~~
- ~~k) ~~m)~~ Ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.~~
- n) Ensure Members' Meetings are held in accordance with C. Section 2 of these By-Laws.
- o) Present an annual budget to the Church in accordance with G. of these By-Laws
- p) Present annual nominations for corporate officers, board of directors, and administrative positions to Church in accordance with and D. Section 4, E. Section 2, and F. of these By-Laws

Recommendation 3e- By-Laws, D. Officers, Section 2 Elders- Paragraph 9

The Council of Elders shall have the authority to create and assign ministry teams and positions to which it may delegate any specified aspect of its responsibility. ~~The Council may also delegate to the Deacons the authority to appoint Deacons or other members of the Church to serve as members of such ministry teams. Every ministry team shall have a chairperson responsible for the overall operation of the ministry team, who shall be appointed by the Council. The Council may delegate the responsibility for selecting the chairperson to the Deacons or to the ministry team. The Council may also delegate to the Deacons the responsibility of developing and maintaining written procedures that govern these ministry teams.~~ Every ministry team shall be led by an Elder, a Deacon elected by the Church, or a ministry team leader appointed by the Council. The Council shall have the authority to dissolve any ministry team or position which it created.

Recommendation 3f- By-Laws, E. Elections, Section 2- Election of Officers, Paragraph 1 & 6

The initial election of ~~Scriptural Officers~~ an Elder shall be held at a Special Members' Meeting of the Church. ~~The reelection of a Lay Elder or the election or reelection of a Deacon may occur at any Members' Meeting.~~ Names of nominees to serve as Lay Elders and Deacons shall be presented by the Council of Elders and made known to the Church at least one month prior ~~to their initial election and two weeks prior to their reelection to voting.~~ Church members who believe God is calling them to serve as a Lay Elder may nominate themselves in writing to the Council of Elders for consideration. Church members shall be given the opportunity to nominate Deacons for consideration by the Council of Elders when existing Deacon ministry positions become available or when new Deacon ministry positions are created by the Council of Elders.

The persons elected shall assume their respective offices upon election, unless another date has been specifically designated. ~~Elections for officers may occur during the course of the year at any Members' Meeting, upon recommendation of the Elders.~~

Recommendation 3g- By-Laws, E. Elections, Section 5- Ordination, Paragraph 1 & 2

By-Laws, E. Elections, **Section 5- Ordination**²

All Elders shall be considered ordained ministers of the Church as long as they are serving in the Office of Elder. After the initial election of an Elder not previously ordained by a gospel-preaching church, the Church shall ordain him by the laying on of hands in a corporate worship service.

Former Lay Elders of the Church shall not be considered ordained ministers of the Church.

Recommendation #4 – Deacons

The elder council recommends making the following changes to our constitution and by-laws that pertain to the office of deacons.

Recommendation 4a- Constitution, Article VII: Officers (footnote- part b)

The office of deacon shall be filled with biblically qualified men or women.

Recommendation 4b- By-Laws, B. Church Polity, Section 2- Church Officers, b)
Deacons

To ensure that the Elders are able to focus their primary attention on the ministry of the Word, prayer, and oversight of the Church, the Church shall elect Deacons to help meet the tangible, organizational, and mercy needs of the Church. Deacons shall receive ministry task assignments from the Elders. These tasks will concentrate on meeting the practical needs of the fellowship.

² "Minister" is not a term the Church regularly uses to describe those in the office of pastor/elder. However, both the state of Virginia and the Internal Revenue Service of the United States of America use this term to describe those ordained by the church. Therefore, the Church will only use this term in reference to ordination.

Recommendation 4c- By-Laws, D. Officers, Section 3- Deacons

~~The office of Deacon is described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-7. Deacons shall be men and women who satisfy the qualifications for the office of Deacon set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.~~ The church shall recognize men and women who are giving of themselves in service to the Church, who possess gifts of leadership and who are called to further service.

A ~~man~~ nominee must have been a member of the Church for at least one year before being able to be considered as a Deacon candidate.

The church shall elect Deacons in accordance with E. Sections 1 and 2 of these By-Laws. These men and women shall be received as gifts of Christ to His Church and set apart as Deacons. Deacons shall be reelected by the Church biennially. After a Deacon has served three consecutive two-year terms, they may only be reelected to the office of Deacon after a respite. The respite shall be a minimum of 6 months.

Recommendation 4d- By-Laws, E. Elections, Section 2- Election of Officers, Paragraph

1

The initial election of ~~Scriptural Officers~~ an Elder shall be held at a Special Members' Meeting of the Church. The reelection of a Lay Elder or the election or reelection of a Deacon may occur at any Members' Meeting. Names of nominees to serve as Lay Elders and Deacons shall be presented by the Council of Elders and made known to the Church at least one month prior to their initial election and two weeks prior to their reelection ~~to voting~~. Church members who believe God is calling them to serve as a Lay Elder may nominate themselves in writing to the Council of Elders for consideration. Church members shall be given the opportunity to nominate Deacons for consideration by the Council of Elders when existing Deacon ministry positions become available or when new Deacon ministry positions are created by the Council of Elders.

Recommendation 4e- By-Laws, E. Elections, Section 5- Ordination, Paragraph 3

By-Laws, E. Elections, Section 5- Ordination

Deacons shall not be considered ordained ministers of the Church.

PART FOUR

CONSTITUTION & BY-LAWS WITH CHANGES

**CONSTITUTION OF NANSEMOND RIVER BAPTIST CHURCH OF
SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA APPROVED ON DECEMBER 14, 2008
Amended January 17, 2021**

2023 Recommendations for ~~deletion~~ & insertion

PREAMBLE

This Constitution replaces and supersedes any and all prior Constitutions of the Nansemond River Baptist Church.

We, the members of the Nansemond River Baptist Church of Suffolk, Virginia, 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 known as "Nansemond River Baptist Church," hereafter referred to as the "Church."

ARTICLE II: Purpose

This Church is a nonprofit ecclesiastical corporation organized and operated exclusively to glorify God and exalt Jesus by reaching up through worship and prayer, reaching in through discipleship and fellowship, and reaching out through evangelism and ministry. To this end we are committed to proclaiming the whole counsel of God, especially His glorious Gospel of Grace in Jesus Christ throughout the world and to defending the "faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." (Jude 3, ESV)

ARTICLE III: Articles of Faith

As a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, the Articles of Faith of this Church shall be the same as that of *The Baptist Faith and Message* adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention June 14, 2000, or as amended.⁺

ARTICLE IV: Statement of Biblical Belief Regarding Marriage and Sexuality

We believe and affirm the term "marriage" has only one meaning: a single, exclusive covenantal union between one man and one woman, for life, sanctioned by God as delineated in Scripture.

We believe and affirm that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that God has commanded no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

⁺ ~~*The Baptist Faith and Message* states, "Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons." The Church understands "pastors" and "elders" are synonymous.~~

We believe and affirm from the teaching of Scripture that any other form of sexual conduct, such as adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bisexuality, gender reassignment, bestiality, incest, pedophilia, polygamy, or pornography is sinful and offensive to God.

We believe and affirm that in order to preserve the function and integrity of the church as the local body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the church members and the community, it is imperative that all church members, those employed by the church, or those who serve as volunteers in any capacity, shall abide by and agree to this Statement of Biblical Belief Regarding Marriage and Sexuality and conduct themselves accordingly by the grace of God.

ARTICLE V: Church Polity

Ultimate authority lies in Christ as the head of the Church and in the Scripture as the basis for all faith and practice. This Church shall remain free and self-governing. The government is vested in its membership and administered by its officers. In function, final authority shall reside in the membership as led by the Holy Spirit. They shall approve and/or affirm Biblically qualified leadership, to carry out Christ's purposes.

ARTICLE VI: Membership

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized upon profession of their faith, who bears the fruit of conversion, who has read and expresses agreement with the Church Covenant,² and who is willing to submit themselves for consideration for membership according to the Constitution and By-Laws of this Church shall be eligible for membership.

ARTICLE VII: Officers

The officers of this Church shall be Elders and Deacons.³

ARTICLE VIII: Administrative Positions

The administrative positions under this Constitution are Clerk, and Treasurer, ~~and Financial Secretary~~.

ARTICLE IX: Affiliation

- A. Believing that the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia and the Southern Baptist Convention are in harmony and in the spirit of the Constitution and Articles of Faith of this Church, we agree to participate in these organizations.

² See ~~Constitution and~~ By-Laws Appendix 1

³ The office of Elder shall only be filled by biblically qualified men. The office of deacon shall be filled with biblically qualified men or women.

- B. This Church may withdraw its affiliation from the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia and/or the Southern Baptist Convention at a Special Members' Meeting. This meeting requires a 75% quorum of the eligible voting Church members. A three-fourths majority vote will be required for passage. This vote shall be by written ballot.

ARTICLE X: Property Holding

The securing and maintaining of real property, buildings and equipment of this Church shall be for the express purpose of providing facilities for public worship and for the engagement of the missionary, educational, benevolent and social interests of this Church. These purposes shall be carried out in the spirit and character of this Constitution.

ARTICLE XI: Amendments

Amendments to this Constitution may be made at any Special Members' Meeting when proposed amendments have been presented to the membership in writing and published for at least one month prior to the Special Members' Meeting as provided in C. Section 2 Special Members' Meeting of the By-Laws of this Church.

BY-LAWS
Amended January 17, 2021

2023 Recommendations for ~~deletion~~ & insertion

These By-Laws replace and supersede any and all prior By-Laws of the Nansemond River Baptist Church, hereafter referred to as the “Church.”

A. Membership

Section 1 - Qualifications

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized upon profession of their faith, who bears the fruit of conversion, who has read and expresses agreement with the Church Covenant,¹ and who is willing to submit themselves for consideration for membership according to the Constitution and By-Laws of this Church shall be eligible for membership.

Section 2 - Admission of Members

~~The Elders² shall be responsible for determining each person's qualification for membership. Before acceptance into Church covenant membership the applicant shall attend a New Members Class in order that the Elders may ascertain his or her Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and serious intent to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this Church.~~

The Elders shall be responsible for evaluating each person's qualification for membership. Before being presented to the Church for covenant membership, the applicant shall attend a New Members Class in order to learn about the church's doctrines, practices, and responsibilities of membership. Upon completion of the New Members Class, the applicant shall meet with an Elder in order that he may ascertain the applicant's Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, agreement with the Church Covenant, and serious intent to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this Church.

To be admitted into ~~Church~~ covenant membership, applicants shall be presented by the Elders for admission and accepted by vote of the members at any ~~regular Sunday worship service~~ Members' Meeting. The congregation shall then receive the applicant into membership by a three-fourths majority vote.

Section 3 - Duties and Privileges of Membership

In accord with the duties enumerated in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the Church, consistent

¹ See ~~Constitution and~~ By-Laws Appendix 1

² ~~The Baptist Faith and Message states, "Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons." The Church understands "pastors" and "elders" are synonymous.~~

with God's leading and with the gifts, time and material resources each has received from God. Only members shall be eligible to serve as officers or ministry team leaders. Non-members are eligible to serve on ministry teams. Additionally, non-members may serve the Church for purposes of support and professional consultation.³ It is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all Members' Meetings and vote on the election of officers, on decisions regarding membership status and on such other matters as may be submitted to a vote. All persons who are accepted as members, shall be entitled to vote in person ~~(but not by proxy)~~ provided the member is 16 years of age or older. Proxy voting is not allowed. At the discretion of the Elders, votes concerning sensitive matters of church discipline may be limited to members 18 years of age and older.

Section 4 - On Church Discipline

The primary goal of Church Discipline is redemption and reconciliation. Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties, as outlined in A. Section 3, or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored and so opposing the welfare of the Church, shall be subject to the admonition of the Elders and the discipline of the Church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and the example of Scripture. Church discipline should only be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed.

Section 5 – Membership Termination

~~Membership may be terminated by any of the following actions:~~

Membership shall only be terminated by vote of the Church. An individual's membership may be terminated by vote of the members present at any Members' Meeting for the following reasons:

- a) Voluntary request for his or her membership to be rescinded,
- b) Transfer request by letter from another gospel-preaching church,
- c) As an act of Church discipline at the recommendation of the Elders and by a two-thirds majority vote ~~of the members present at any Members' Meeting,~~
- d) Willful negligence of the duties and privileges of membership as outlined in A. Section 3, ~~for more than a year,~~ upon the recommendation of the Elders, ~~at the Annual Members' Meeting by a two-thirds majority vote.~~

B. Church Polity

Section 1 - Membership

Under the authority of Jesus Christ and the Word of God, the membership of the Church is the final authority. The membership exercises its authority through the election of officers to govern the Church. However, the vote of the membership at a properly called Members' Meeting, as

³ See Article VI of the Constitution

provided in these By-Laws, shall be required to affect the following actions:

- a) Accept members into the Church,⁴
- b) Elect Scriptural Officers of the Church,
- c) Elect Corporate Officers of the Church and a Board of Directors,
- d) ~~Terminate members as outlined in A. Section 5e and 5d, Terminate an individual's membership in the Church.~~
- e) Approve annual budgets of the Church,
- f) Authorize any expenditure of the funds of the Church when such expenditure is not covered by an approved budget, except as provided for in G. Budget and Finance
- g) g) Approve any transactions regarding real property,
- h) Accept, reject or otherwise dispose of any matter submitted to the membership of the Church by the Council of Elders,
- i) Adopt, amend or repeal the Constitution, By-Laws, and Covenant of this Church,
- j) Approve the call, job description and initial salary of the Lead Pastor and Pastor(s),
- k) Approve the job description and initial salary for all paid staff positions,
- l) Affiliate or discontinue affiliation with any denomination, convention or association.

Section 2 - Church Offices

The Scriptural Officers of the Church shall be Elders and Deacons, who shall be members of the Church.

a) Elders

The leadership of the Church shall be vested in a plurality of ordained Elders, who are responsible for governing the Church, teaching the Word and tending the flock of God in this Church. The Elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. Elders may be identified as Lead Pastor, Pastor, and Lay Elder. Lead Pastor and Pastor(s) are vocational and Lay Elders are non-vocational.

A Council of Elders shall be selected by the body of Elders to perform the duties as provided in D. Section 2 of these By-Laws. The Council of Elders shall elect its own Chairman for the purpose of moderating elder meetings.

The Council of Elders of this Church shall recommend to the members no less than three Elders to serve as a board of directors, to be elected by the church at the Annual Members' Meeting. The board of directors shall be called upon to perform the legal and business transactions specifically designated to them by the Laws of the Commonwealth. In the discharge of their duties, they shall act only at the direction of the Council of Elders and of the Church.

b) Deacons

To ensure that the Elders are able to focus their primary attention on the ministry of the

⁴~~Members may also be voted upon at any Sunday worship service.~~

Word, prayer, and oversight of the Church, ~~the Church shall elect Deacons to help meet the tangible, organizational, and mercy needs of the Church. Deacons shall receive ministry task assignments from the Elders. These tasks will concentrate on meeting the practical needs of the fellowship.~~

C. Meetings

Section 1 - Worship Meetings

Worship services shall be held each Lord's Day and may be held throughout the week as the Elders determine.

Section 2 - Members' Meetings

In every meeting together, members shall act in a spirit of mutual trust, openness and loving consideration, which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

An Elder designated by the Council of Elders shall preside as moderator at all Members' meetings of the Church. The Elders shall see that the stated meetings of the Church are regularly held and that required reports are submitted to the Church ~~by the responsible members or ministry team leaders.~~

The ~~designated secretary of the Council of Elders~~ moderator shall determine if the requirements of a quorum are met for all Members' Meetings. ~~The Clerk shall record the minutes. In the absence of the Clerk for any Members' Meeting, the Council of Elders shall appoint a member to perform the duties of the Clerk. Meeting minutes shall be made available to the congregation prior to the following regularly scheduled Members' Meeting.~~

Meetings shall be conducted according to Robert's Rules of Order, unless these By-Laws specify otherwise.

~~Meeting minutes shall be made available to the congregation within 30 days.~~

In the event of a government declared state of emergency that prohibits the membership from meeting, the Council of Elders shall be granted authority to suspend by-law requirements and make appropriate decisions on behalf of the congregation until such a time as holding a members' meeting becomes feasible.

a) Annual Members' Meeting

There shall be an Annual Members' Meeting, at which corporate officers and a board of directors are elected, and a budget approved by the membership, no more than three nor less than one month prior to the start of the fiscal year. The fiscal year will commence on January 1. For the Annual Members' Meeting, a quorum shall consist of 10% of the eligible voting Church members. The Elders shall present a meeting agenda to the Church no less than one week prior to the meeting. The agenda will then be approved at the start of the meeting.

b) Quarterly Members' Meetings

There shall be Quarterly Members' Meetings. For these meetings a quorum shall consist of 10% of the eligible voting Church members. The Elders shall present a meeting agenda to the Church no less than one week prior to the meeting. The agenda will then be approved at the start of the meeting.

c) Special Members' Meetings

Special Members' Meetings may be called as required by the Council of the Elders. Any member or ministry team may bring a request to the Elders to call a Special Members' Meeting.

In the event that the two parties are not able to come to agreement on the need for a Special Members' Meeting the requesting party may submit a written request, with the signatures of any 5% of the voting members, to the Elders. Upon receipt of the signatures, the Council of Elders will call a Special Members' Meeting.

The date, time and purpose of any Special Members' Meeting shall be announced at all public services of the Church beginning at least two weeks prior to the meeting. The agenda, which may not be amended, will be presented by the Elders one week prior to the meeting.

For Special Members' Meetings other than a meeting held for the purpose of amending the Constitution, By-Laws, or Church Covenant, changing the Church's affiliation with the Southern Baptist Convention, or dismissing an Elder or Deacon, a quorum shall consist of 10% of the eligible voting Church members. The agenda shall be approved at the start of the meeting.

- i) Special Members' Meetings held for the purpose of amending the Constitution, By-Laws, or Church Covenant shall require a quorum consisting of 20% of the eligible voting Church members. A two-thirds majority vote will be required for passage. This vote shall be by written ballot.
- ii) Special Members' Meeting held for the purpose of changing the Church's affiliation with the Southern Baptist Conservatives of Virginia and/or the Southern Baptist Convention requires a 75% quorum of the eligible voting Church members. A three-fourths majority vote will be required for passage. This vote shall be by written ballot.
- iii) Special Members' Meeting held for the purpose of dismissing an Elder or Deacon requires a 20% quorum of the eligible voting Church members. A three-fourths majority vote will be required. This vote shall be by written ballot.

D. Officers

Section 1 - Summary

The Scriptural Officers of the Church are Elders and Deacons. The Corporate Officers of the Corporation shall be the President, Secretary and Treasurer.

Section 2 - Elders

The Elders shall be comprised of men, called by God, who satisfy the qualifications for the office of elder set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Elders may be identified as Lead Pastor, Pastor, and Lay Elder. Lead Pastor and Pastor(s) are vocational and Lay Elders are non-vocational.

A man must be a member for at least two years before being considered as a candidate for the office of Lay Elder.

The Church shall elect Elders, gifted and willing to serve in this calling, in accordance with E. Section 2 of these By-Laws. These men shall be received as gifts of Christ to His Church. Lay Elders shall be reelected by the Church triennially. After a Lay Elder has served two consecutive three-year terms, he may only be reelected to the office of Elder after a respite. The respite shall be for a minimum of 6 months.

The Lead Pastor, assisted by the other Pastors, shall be charged with the primary preaching and teaching ministry of the Church as well as the oversight of the day-to-day operation of the Church.

An Elder's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. Any two members of the Church (I Timothy 5:19) with reason to believe that an Elder should be dismissed should express such concern in writing to the Council of Elders. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 and I Timothy 5:17-21. Dismissal of an Elder may only occur at a Special Members' Meeting.

The Council of Elders will be responsible for oversight of the ministry and resources of the Church. ~~A majority of the Council shall be composed of Lay Elders not in the regular pay of the Church~~ At least half of the Council shall be composed of Lay Elders, and no Elder shall hold the office of Deacon.

The Council of Elders shall take responsibility to perform the following functions:

- a) ~~Examine, and instruct, and present~~ prospective members to the Church for consideration for membership
- b) Examine and present candidates for the offices of Elder and Deacon to the Church for consideration in accordance with E. Sections 1 and 2 of these By-Laws.
- c) Appoint ministry team leaders, as needed, to assist them with carrying out the mission and vision of the Church.

- ~~b) d)~~ Oversee the work of the Deacons, Church administrative positions and ministry teams
- e) ~~e)~~ Oversee worship services
- ~~d) f)~~ Oversee the administration of ~~administer~~ the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper
- e) ~~g)~~ Equip the membership for the work of the ministry
- ~~f) h)~~ Encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error
- ~~g) i)~~ Oversee the process of Church discipline
- ~~h) j)~~ Approve membership letters of transfer Present individuals to the Church for termination of membership
- i) ~~k)~~ Coordinate and promote the ministries of the Church
- ~~j) l)~~ Mobilize the Church for world missions
- k) ~~m)~~ Ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.
- ~~n)~~ Ensure Members' Meetings are held in accordance with C. Section 2 of these By-Laws.
- ~~o)~~ Present an annual budget to the Church in accordance with G. of these By-Laws
- ~~p)~~ Present annual nominations for corporate officers, board of directors, and administrative positions to Church in accordance with and D. Section 4, E. Section 2, and F. of these By-Laws

The Council of Elders shall have the authority to create and assign ministry teams and positions to which it may delegate any specified aspect of its responsibility. ~~The Council may also delegate to the Deacons the authority to appoint Deacons or other members of the Church to serve as members of such ministry teams. Every ministry team shall have a chairperson responsible for the overall operation of the ministry team, who shall be appointed by the Council. The Council may delegate the responsibility for selecting the chairperson to the Deacons or to the ministry team. The Council may also delegate to the Deacons the responsibility of developing and maintaining written procedures that govern these ministry teams. Every ministry team shall be led by an Elder, a Deacon elected by the Church, or a ministry team leader appointed by the Council.~~ The Council shall have the authority to dissolve any ministry team or position which it created.

The Council of Elders may also propose paid staff positions, and the Council shall present a job description for each paid position to the membership for approval.

The Council of Elders shall have primary responsibility to hire, supervise and evaluate staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to the Deacons, other staff members or ministry team(s).

Section 3 - Deacons

~~The office of Deacon is described in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:1-7. Deacons shall be men and women who satisfy the qualifications for the office of Deacon set for in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.~~ The church shall recognize men and women who are giving of themselves in service to the Church, who possess gifts of leadership and who are called to further service.

A ~~man~~ nominee must have been a member of the Church for at least one year before being able to be considered as a Deacon candidate.

The church shall elect Deacons in accordance with E. Sections 1 and 2 of these By-Laws. These men and women shall be received as gifts of Christ to His Church and set apart as Deacons. Deacons shall be reelected by the Church biennially. After a Deacon has served three consecutive two-year terms, they may only be reelected to the office of Deacon after a respite. The respite shall be a minimum of 6 months.

The Deacons, with the agreement of the Council of Elders, may establish unpaid administrative positions or ministry teams to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities in the Church.

A Deacon's term of office may be terminated by resignation or by dismissal. Any two members of the Church with reason to believe that a Deacon should be dismissed should express such concern in writing to the Council of Elders. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17. Dismissal of a Deacon may only occur at a Special Members' Meeting.

Section 4 - Corporate Officers

The Council of Elders shall nominate the corporate officers annually to be elected by the members of the church at its Annual Members' Meeting. Corporate officers will perform tasks as assigned by the Board of Directors.

E. Elections

Section 1 - Principles

The process for Church elections shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following principles:

- a) Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, should be an integral part of the election process,
- b) Nominations should proceed with the support of the Elders,
- c) All candidates for Church office should be treated with the grace, kindness and honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members,
- d) The election process shall express a spirit of mutual trust, openness and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Section 2 - Election of Officers

The initial election of ~~Scriptural Officers~~ an Elder shall be held at a Special Members' Meeting of the Church. The reelection of a Lay Elder or the election or reelection of a Deacon may occur at any Members' Meeting. Names of nominees to serve as Lay Elders and Deacons shall be presented by the Council of Elders and made known to the Church at least one month prior to their initial election and two weeks prior to their reelection ~~to voting~~. Church members who believe God is calling them to serve as a Lay Elder may nominate themselves in writing to the Council of Elders for consideration. Church members shall be given the opportunity to

nominate Deacons for consideration by the Council of Elders when existing Deacon ministry positions become available or when new Deacon ministry positions are created by the Council of Elders.

Any member with reason to believe that a nominee is unqualified for an office should express such concern to the Elders in writing. Members intending to speak in opposition to a candidate should express their objection to the Elders at least two weeks prior to the Church Members' Meeting. If a candidate is not presented by the Council of Elders to the Church, the Council of Elders shall meet with the candidate to convey the reasons for their decision.

The election of Corporate Officers and a Board of Directors shall be held at the Annual Members' Meeting of the Church.

The moderator shall declare elected all persons receiving a three-fourths majority of all votes cast for any office.

The persons elected shall assume their respective offices upon election, unless another date has been specifically designated. ~~Elections for officers may occur during the course of the year at any Members' Meeting, upon recommendation of the Elders.~~

Section 3 - Calling of the Lead Pastor

In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the Church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential Lead Pastor, and before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the Elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Articles of Faith, Church Covenant, Constitution, and By-Laws of this Church. The election of the Lead Pastor shall be held at a Special Members' Meeting as provided in C. Section 2 of these By-Laws.

Section 4 - Calling of Pastor

In the calling of any man to the position of a Pastor, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the Church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the spiritual gifts of any potential Pastor, and before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the Elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the Articles of Faith, Church Covenant, Constitution, and By-Laws of this Church. The election of the Pastor shall be held at a Special Members' Meeting as provided in C. Section 2 of these By-Laws.

Section 5 - Ordination

All Elders shall be considered ordained ministers⁵ of the Church as long as they are serving in the Office of Elder. After the initial election of an Elder not previously ordained by a gospel-

⁵ "Minister" is not a term the Church regularly uses to describe those in the office of pastor/elder. However, both the state of Virginia and the Internal Revenue Service of the United States of America use this term to describe those ordained by the church. Therefore, the Church will only use this term in reference to ordination.

preaching church, the Church shall ordain him by the laying on of hands in a corporate worship service.

Former Lay Elders of the Church shall not be considered ordained ministers of the Church.

Deacons shall not be considered ordained ministers of the Church.

F. Administrative Positions

Section 1 - Summary

The administrative positions under the Constitution and these By-Laws are Clerk and Treasurer. All persons holding these positions must be members of the Church.

The Church, upon nomination by the Council of Elders, shall elect at the Annual Meeting members to the positions of Clerk and Treasurer. The Treasurer shall be bonded by the Church in a suitable amount. The Elders shall provide a written description of duties to the Clerk and Treasurer.

G. Budget and Finance

Ministry team leaders shall present an itemized budget of their assigned ministry areas to the Council of Elders and Church Finance Team at least two months preceding the Annual Members' Meeting. With the approval of the Council of Elders the proposed budget shall be presented to the Church at least two weeks preceding the Annual Members' Meeting. This budget shall be presented for discussion at that time and called up for a vote at the Annual Members' Meeting.

Once a fiscal year has begun the Church Finance Team, with the approval of the Elder Council, may reclassify up to \$2,500.00 of budgeted amounts from one budgeted line item to another budgeted line item. The members of the church shall be notified of reclassification of funds by the Church Finance Team at the next scheduled Members' Meeting following the change.

The Council of Elders and Church Finance Team shall maintain a Charitable Giving Policy, which shall govern all gifts, both undesignated and designated, to the church.

H. Amendments

Amendments to these By-Laws may be made at any Special Members' Meeting when proposed amendments have been presented to the membership in writing and published for at least one month prior to the Special Members' Meeting as provided in C. Section 2 Special Members' Meeting of the By-Laws of this Church.

By-Laws Appendix 1

NRBC Membership Covenant

Church membership is a covenant made between an individual and a local congregation. Members of Nansemond River Baptist Church agree to participate in the mission and vision of the church, affirm the core beliefs and core values of the church, and to seek to live a life that reflects the core competencies of the church. Likewise, the congregation commits to accepting the individual into the life of the church, equipping the individual for service within the church, and holding the individual accountable in his or her walk with Christ.

❖ We promise to actively participate in the **Mission** of NRBC:

- Our Mission is to make disciples that make disciples.

❖ We promise to actively participate in the **Vision** of NRBC:

- We exist to glorify God and exalt Jesus by reaching up through worship and prayer, reaching in through discipleship and fellowship, and reaching out through evangelism and ministry.

❖ We affirm six **Core Beliefs** which summarize our statement of faith contained in the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. These six Core Beliefs are:

1. We believe the Bible is God's Word. Because the Bible is God's Word, it is completely true, wholly authoritative, and must be proclaimed.
2. We believe there is one, true living God. He is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He is the creator and sustainer of all creation, perfect in His being and purposes, and deserving of all worship and praise.
3. We believe all people are created in the image of God. God loves all people as the crowning work of His creation. However, everyone is born separated from God by sin. The sin nature that we all possess prevents us from doing anything on our own that could restore that relationship.
4. We believe salvation is by grace through faith in the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ alone. Salvation makes sinful man right with God, brings us into his family, and continues throughout the believer's life to make him or her into the likeness of Christ. All true believers will persevere to the end and will be rewarded with eternal life.
5. We believe the church is both universal and local. All believers are placed by the Holy Spirit into the universal church upon coming to faith in Christ. The local church is an autonomous, local expression of God's family with a clear mission. The local church is led and served by the Biblical offices of

mission. The local church is led and served by the Biblical offices of pastor/elder and deacon. The two ordinances of the church are believers' baptism and the Lord's Supper.

6. We believe God established the family as the foundational institution of human society. Marriage between one man and one woman for life is the cornerstone of God's design for the family. Children are a blessing from the Lord and should be taught the Word of God in the home by example and instruction.

❖ We affirm six **Core Values** which serve as guiding principles for what we value and prioritize. Each Core Value is driven by one of our six Core Beliefs. These six Core Values are:

1. We value expositional preaching in our corporate gatherings, the systematic teaching of God's Word in small groups, and the personal study and application of Scripture by all believers.
2. We value worship and prayer and seek to glorify God both corporately and individually.
3. We value every human life and will demonstrate God's love to all people at all times while giving special support to those in need including the unborn, the orphan, and the widow.
4. We value the gospel and its centrality to the life and mission of all believers and the unifying message of our church as we seek to proclaim the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in our community and around the world.
5. We value a diverse, multi-generational congregation, led by a plurality of elders and served by faithful deacons, which is driven to accomplish the mission of making disciples together.
6. We value marriage and family; we will work to honor marriages, support families, partner with parents to disciple their children, and encourage singles in their commitment to Christ.

❖ We promise to actively seek Christian growth by evaluating our lives according to six **Core Competencies** to see if they are marked by faithfulness and growth in each area. These six Core Competencies are:

1. In WORSHIP through passionate participation in corporate singing, cheerful and sacrificial giving to support the ministries and mission of the church, and active learning when the Bible is being preached.
2. In PRAYER through consistent intercession for the needs of fellow believers

as well as the lost in our community and around the world and heartfelt praise and thanksgiving to God.

3. In DISCIPLESHIP through significant engagement in a small group, learning to read, study, and obey the Bible, and identifying my spiritual gifts and using them to strengthen the church.
4. In FELLOWSHIP through developing meaningful relationships and partnering together to care for and love others within my church.
5. In EVANGELISM through growing in compassion for those who do not know Christ and cultivating relationships with the lost and intentionally seeking opportunities to verbally share the gospel.
6. In MINISTRY through caring for and participating in meeting the tangible needs of those in my community and around the world.

❖ Should our lives not reflect the above commitments, we promise to respond in repentance and Christian character to the biblical practice of church discipline by other church members, the elders, or the congregation. Also, we promise that if we leave NRBC, we will diligently seek to unite with another Church where we can continue to carry out the mission of God.

PART FIVE

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Recommended Resources

Anyabwile, Thabiti. *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

———. *What is a Healthy Church Member?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008.

Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*. 3rd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013.

———. *What Is a Healthy Church?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007.

Hammett, John S., and Benjamin L Merkle, eds. *Those Who Must Give an Account: A Study of Church Membership and Church Discipline*. Nashville: B&H, 2012.

Leeman, Jonathan. *Church Discipline: How the Church Protects the Name of Jesus*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

———. *Church Membership: How the World Knows Who Represents Jesus*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012.

———. *Don't Fire Your Church Members: The Case for Congregationalism*. Nashville: B&H, 2016.

Merkle, Benjamin L. *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009.

———. *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008.

Newton, Phil A. and Matt Schumer. *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014.

Rinne, Jeramie. *Church Elders: How to Shephrd God's People Like Jesus*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014.

Smethurst, Matt. *Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021.

Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership: Restoring Eldership to Rightful Place in Church*. Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995.