



# The Gathering in Peterborough: Constitution

**Preamble:**

The Gathering in Peterborough will be a Christian church that will exist for the advancement of religion. The Gathering in Peterborough and all of its activities will be carried on without purpose of gain for its members, and any profits or other assets of The Gathering in Peterborough will be used solely to promote its objectives. In the event that The Gathering in Peterborough should dissolve, terminating its operations, all of its assets shall be donated to a Canadian registered charity.

The members of The Gathering in Peterborough set forth the following articles to which we voluntarily submit ourselves:

**Article 1: Name and Date of Establishment**

The name of this church is "The Gathering in Peterborough," and is located in Peterborough, Ontario. The Trent Gathering was established on April 28, 2013.

Hereafter, in this document, The Gathering in Peterborough will be referred to as "the church" or "this church."

**Article 2: Purpose**

The purpose of the Gathering in Peterborough is to advance and teach the religious tenets, doctrines and observances associated with the Christian faith.

**Article 3: Doctrinal Beliefs**

This church accepts the Bible as its supreme and complete authority in all matters of doctrine and practice.

However, since there is widespread disagreement about what the Bible actually teaches, we also generally accept and hold to "The 1644 Baptist Confession of Faith" as an excellent summary of the basic teachings of the Bible. We do not accept this confession as infallible and authoritative rule of faith on par with the Bible, but as an anchor and help in theological controversy.

**Article 4: Organizational Structure**

1. Elders

The elders of this church will be interchangeably called "elders" or "pastors." They will be primarily devoted to pastoral work; namely, prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). Elders will also bear ultimate responsibility to govern the church according to the beliefs and practices prescribed by our constitution.

Elders will hold their office indefinitely except in the following circumstances:

- i. An elder is no longer willing to hold this office in the church. In such cases, that elder will resign from his office.
- ii. An elder comes to believe that it is not in the best interests of the church for him to continue to hold his office. In such cases, that elder will resign from his office.

- iii. An elder is no longer Biblically qualified to hold this office in the church, according to the requirements outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. In such cases, that elder will resign or be removed from his office by a vote of the members of the church at a Members' Meeting.

Whenever an elder vacates his position, the other elders will make known the vacancy to the congregation, and will search for a new elder to take his place, if possible. All prospective elders must meet the Biblical requirements outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Qualified men will be recommended to the members of the church by the current elders and elected to the office of elder by a vote of the members of the church at a Members' Meeting. In addition to replacing elders, new elders may be added even when a position has not been vacated. In this case, the process for adding elders is the same as outlined above: "Qualified men will be recommended to the members of the church by the current elders and elected to the office of elder by a vote of the members of the church at a Members' Meeting."

Whenever the church is financially able, and whenever it would serve to advance the purpose of the church, the church will pay a salary or honorarium to one (or more) of these elders in return for an increased personal investment in pastoral work and prayer within the church in keeping with the biblical instruction that "those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." (1 Corinthians 9:14)

Elders are implicitly considered members of the church, and will have one vote each during Congregational Decisions at Members' Meetings.

## 2. Deacons

Deacons will serve the church, under the authority of the elders, by overseeing its administration and practical concerns so that the elders may devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

All prospective deacons must meet the Biblical requirements outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Qualified persons will be recommended to the members of the church by the elders and elected to the office of deacon by a vote of the members of the church at a Members' Meeting.

Deacons will hold their office indefinitely except in the following circumstances:

- i. A deacon is no longer willing to hold this office in the church. In such cases, that deacon will resign from his office.
- ii. A deacon comes to believe that it is not in the best interests of the church for him to continue to hold his office. In such cases, that deacon will resign from his office.
- iii. A deacon is no longer Biblically qualified to hold this office in the church. In such cases, that deacon will resign or be removed from his office by a vote of the members of the church at a Members' Meeting.

Whenever the church is financially able, and whenever it would serve to advance the purpose of the church, the church may pay a salary or honorarium to one (or more) of these

deacons in return for an increased personal investment in the work of the church, so that the elders may “devote [themselves] to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4).

Deacons are implicitly considered members of the church, and will have one vote each during Congregational Decisions at Members’ Meetings.

3. Non-elder and non-deacon staff members

- i. Whenever the church is financially able, and whenever it would serve to advance the purpose of the church, the church may hire one (or more) paid non-elder and non-deacon staff member. Such staff members will work under the authority and guidance of the elders and/or deacons.

4. Members

- i. Any person who professes and demonstrates allegiance to and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and who expresses substantial agreement with the Doctrinal Beliefs of this church (see Article 3) will be eligible for membership.
- ii. Members are expected to demonstrate allegiance to and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ by endeavouring to submit to God’s will as revealed in the Bible. God’s will for all Christians includes:
  - a. Consistent church attendance (Hebrews 10:25). At The Gathering in Peterborough, this means that members should consistently attend at least our weekly large group worship meeting, and a weekly small group meeting whenever applicable.
  - b. Using their strengths and gifts to serve the other members of the church for the good of the whole community (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). At The Gathering in Peterborough, this means that members should take an active interest in the other members of the church, seeking not only to be blessed by others, but also to be a blessing to them. This includes attendance and participation in Members’ Meetings whenever possible.
  - c. Submission to church leaders (Hebrews 13:17), including submission to our church discipline processes (Article 5). At The Gathering in Peterborough, this means that members should endeavour to trust, respect, and follow the elders. It also means that members should inform the elders if they are having difficulty submitting to their leadership so that the elders can endeavour to work together with such a member to resolve the problem at hand.
  - d. Generous and systematic financial giving to the local church so that God’s work can continue (1 Corinthians 9:14, 1 Corinthians 16:2, 2 Corinthians 8-9). At The Gathering in Peterborough this means that each member should contribute generously and systematically to the weekly collection of offering.
  - e. Telling non-Christians about the gospel (Matthew 28: 16-20; Romans 10:13-15). At The Gathering in Peterborough this means that each member should make and take opportunities to share the gospel with non-Christians in his

- or her sphere of influence. It also means that each member should pray for and cooperate with other members' efforts to spread the gospel.
- f. Pursuing sanctification (Romans 8:12-17, 1 Thessalonians 4:3). At The Gathering in Peterborough this means repenting of all known sin and engaging in healthy spiritual habits including daily Bible reading and prayer.
- iii. Any person desiring membership who meets the above mentioned requirements (Article 4.4.i.) must verbally make their desire for membership known to one of the elders.
  - iv. When a prospective member (hereafter referred to as "the applicant") has made his or her desire for membership known to one of the elders the following process will commence as soon as possible:
    - a. The applicant will attend a Membership Class in which one (or more) of the elders will articulate and explain the expectations, privileges, and responsibilities of members and will articulate and explain our doctrinal beliefs. During this Membership Class the applicant will have the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions or raise any of his or her potential concerns and/or hesitations.
    - b. After attending a Membership Class, if the applicant desires to continue with the application process, he or she will be required to attend a Membership Interview with one (or more) of the elders. During this interview the applicant will be expected:
      - i. to articulate his or her understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and affirm his or her personal acceptance of the gospel.
      - ii. to verbally affirm substantial agreement with the Doctrinal Beliefs of this church, and his or her intention to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this church.
    - c. After the Membership Interview, if the elders are satisfied that an applicant has met the requirements for membership, they will present a motion to the members of the church at the next Members' Meeting that this church receive the applicant into membership. After hearing the new member's testimony and the elders' recommendation, the members of the church will render a Congregational Decision to receive the applicant into membership or deny the applicant membership.
  - v. A person's membership in this church may be terminated in any of the following ways:
    - a. By transfer. Upon a Congregational Decision, letters of transfer will be granted by the church to members who request them, providing they are in good standing at the time of the application. Letters of transfer shall only be given to other evangelical churches.

- b. By request. A member may request to remove his or her membership from the church. This may be done at any time. All those who so remove their memberships must go through the original application process if they want to rejoin the church again.
- c. By exclusion. It is right and in harmony with the Scriptures for the members of the church, by means of a Congregational Decision and upon recommendation from the elders, to exclude from this fellowship any person who persists in holding heretical doctrine, or who obviously and persistently lives inconsistently with his or her Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the peace and unity of the Church, or who has become inactive and/or defunct (see Matthew 18:15ff; 1 Corinthians 5:1ff; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; Romans 16:17).

### **Article 5: Church Discipline**

Church discipline can be either formative or corrective. Formative church discipline is intended to form godly character and habits within the lives of church members, and corrective church discipline is intended to correct sinful character and habits within the lives of church members. In both cases, the aims of church discipline are always the spiritual health of the member under discipline and of the church as a whole. The most important reason for practicing both kinds of church discipline is to protect the reputation of Jesus.

#### **i. Formative Discipline Process**

At The Gathering in Peterborough, we will encourage each attendee who professes faith in Jesus Christ to become a member. This is because we believe that the accountability of church members to one another and to the elders is healthy and helpful for all Christians. Members are accountable to the elders and to one another for the expectations outlined above (Article 4.4.ii.).

Members are under the care of the elders who regularly pray for the members and keep watch over their souls. From time to time the elders will contact each member to see how they're doing spiritually. Members are also encouraged to care for and talk to one another regularly about the health of their spiritual lives.

This type of consistent and meaningful interaction between church members and elders helps encourage and promote healthy Christian living and helps prevent serious spiritual problems.

#### **ii. Corrective Discipline Process**

In the event that a member has severely or persistently failed to meet the expectations of members (Article 4.4.ii.), the process outlined in Matthew 18:15-20 will usually be followed.

The sinful member should be approached by one person, then two or three if necessary. The one(s) approaching the sinful member should urge him or her to repent of the sin at hand.

If the sinful member refuses to repent, the ones who have approached the sinful member should make the sin known to the elders. The elders will act as representatives of the church, hearing of the sin and urging the sinful member to repent on behalf of the members of the church.

If the sin is serious enough, or persistent enough, to call the sinful member's salvation into question, the elders will present a motion to the members of the church to revoke the sinful member's membership, excluding him or her from membership in the community of God's people (1 Corinthians 5). There will be a period between time the sin is made known to all the members and the time that he or she is excluded during which the other members will have the opportunity to plead with the sinful member to repent. If, after this period, the sinful member is still unrepentant, the members of the church will vote to exclude him or her from membership (2 Corinthians 2:6).

In some cases, it may be prudent to bypass the process and exclude a member at the earliest opportunity. In such cases, a Members' Meeting will be called as soon as possible and the elders will present a motion to the members of the church that the church exclude the sinful person from membership by means of a Congregational Decision.

All decisions to exclude a person from membership must be Congregational Decisions (Article 7.4).

The goal of any corrective discipline process is never to harm the sinful member, but to confront him or her with the seriousness of the sin at hand so that he or she may repent and be restored to fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:5-11).

#### **Article 6: Finances**

1. The fiscal year of this church will begin on May 1 and will end on April 30.
2. This church depends entirely on the voluntary financial gifts of its members, and others who voluntarily decide to give.
3. Each year at a Members' Meeting between January and April, the congregation will vote to approve a budget for the following fiscal year. At least 3 weeks prior to this meeting a detailed budget of the proposed expenditures for the coming year will be made available to the members. Once the budget is approved by a vote of the members of the church it will be the basis for the utilization of church funds.

#### **Article 7: Members' Meetings**

1. "Congregational Decisions" will refer to decisions that a quorum of members will vote on, and which the outcome of that said vote will be considered binding in regard to the business and affairs of the church.

2. "Pastoral Decisions" will refer to decisions that one or more of the elders will make as appointed representatives for the good of the church.
3. Members' Meetings are designed to communicate and discuss both Congregational Decisions and Pastoral Decisions, so that the unity of the church may be preserved and so that the purpose of the church may be accomplished.
4. The following decisions must always be "Congregational Decisions:"
  - i. Receiving persons into membership.
  - ii. Excluding persons from membership.
  - iii. Appointing persons to the office of elder.
  - iv. Removing persons from the office of elder.
  - v. Appointing persons to the office of deacon.
  - vi. Removing persons from the office of deacon.
  - vii. Hiring a paid staff member.
  - viii. Approving the proposed yearly church budget.
  - ix. Amending our Constitution.
5. Other decisions not mentioned in Article 7.4 may be either Pastoral Decisions or Congregational Decisions at the discretion of the elders.
6. The motion for all Congregational Decisions must come from one of the elders with the exception of the motion to remove a person from the office of elder. The reason for this is that the members should generally be looking to the elders for leadership, and respecting their judgment about what decisions must be made and the timing of such decisions. However, in cases where the members do not have confidence in a particular elder, the motion to remove him from his office may come from the floor.
7. There will be two types of Members' Meetings: Ordinary Members' Meetings will be the regularly scheduled meetings that must happen each year. Special Members' Meetings will be irregular meetings that may be called whenever necessary, but are not a necessary part of the church's annual calendar.
  - i. Ordinary Members' Meetings will occur 3 times each year: once between January and April, once between May and August, once between September and December. The exact date, time and place of each of these Ordinary Members' Meeting must be announced at least 3 weeks in advance of the meeting during our weekly worship services. Whenever possible, major Congregational Decisions should be reserved for these Ordinary Members' Meetings.
  - ii. Additional Special Members' Meetings may occur after being announced only 1 week prior to the Special Members' Meeting.
8. Only members are permitted to attend Members' Meetings, with the exception of prospective members to be voted into membership at any particular meeting.
9. 1/3 of church members will constitute a quorum.

10. 2/3 of church members present will be a sufficient majority to make a Congregational Decision.
11. All members over the age of 18 who are present at Members' Meetings will have a vote on Congregational Decisions.