



Constitution

Adopted 7/17/2005
Amended 12/3/2006
Amended 7/27/2014

ARTICLE I: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THIS CONSTITUTION

This written document is a declaration of our beliefs and understanding of the Holy Scripture, as to our doctrinal beliefs, form of church government, organizational structure, and purposes as a body. It is vitally important for a church, if it is to glorify God and accomplish His purposes, that its people be in agreement with regard to doctrine, organizational structure and goals (1 Corinthians 1:10).

This is thus designed to be a statement of these things that it might promote like-mindedness within our church, and that those interested in becoming a part of this ministry might have a clear understanding of our beliefs and objectives.

This document is not a higher authority than the Word of God. Neither is it a higher authority than the authority that God Himself has invested in those believers He has appointed to lead in this local church (Hebrews 13:17). It must be remembered that the local church itself is a living and growing body subject ultimately to the authority of Jesus Christ alone as it is declared in the Word of God (Ephesians 4:12-16). As we grow in the Word, this document is therefore subject to amendment according to the provisions of Article XVII. This document is, however, to be followed in all its parts as a protection to all until any part is amended according to the provisions outlined within this document.

ARTICLE II: NAME

The name of this local church shall be **Hickory Creek Community Church**, a corporation in accord with the Illinois Religious Corporation Act, 805 Illinois Compiled Statutes 110/35, et seq.

ARTICLE III: OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Hickory Creek Community Church is to glorify God by fulfilling the commission given by him as recorded in Matthew 28:19-20. More specifically, we seek to build fully devoted followers of Christ, who are worshiping and growing in their relationship with Christ, fellowshiping with and ministering to the people of Christ, and reaching out in love to those who don't know Christ. This is expressed in our motto to Love God! ...Love People! ...Live it out!

We seek to fulfill our purpose by the following:

- a. Discipleship** – We will teach those in the church the fundamental truths of Scripture so they can be equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16).
- b. Worship** – We will provide the means for developing and expressing meaningful worship in prayer, songs of praise, adoration, admonishment, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper (Hebrews 13:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34; Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:42).
- c. Fellowship** – We will encourage and provide means of developing meaningful relationships among believers (expressions of sharing and caring for, and loving one another, warning, stimulating, and encouraging one another to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24-25; 13:1-2; Acts 2:42-47)).
- d. Ministry** – We will provide the means for developing and exercising spiritual gifts for the edification of the body (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11).
- e. Evangelism** – We will train and encourage people to reach out to those around them in action and word so opportunities may be had to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never received Him.

ARTICLE IV: OUR VISION

We believe that ALL people matter to God and that God wants ALL people in relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, we at Hickory Creek Community Church desire...

-to be a church where people at every stage of life can come and be ministered to so that they can minister to others.
-to be a church where we minister to those who are younger and older, in school and out of school, those with kids and without kids, those who work and those who are retired.
-to be a church where “being” the church is more important than “doing” church.
-to be a church that glorifies God and exalts the name of Christ in everything we do.
-to be a church that is more interested in where people are heading than in where they have been.
-to be a church that encourages people to take the “next step” of faith and maturity from whatever point they are at.
-to be a church where the healthy help the hurting and the hurting are becoming healthy.
-to be a church where the words “Love God...Love People...Live it Out!” is more than just a motto, it is a way of life.

ARTICLE V: DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

A. The Scriptures

We believe that the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments are the verbally inspired Word of God. Though the Bible was written through men, these men wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 2:21) so that these writings are without error (2 Timothy 3:16) in the originals and are authoritative in all matters.

B. The Triune God

We believe there is one and only one living and true God (Deuteronomy 6:4). God is an intelligent, spiritual and personal Being who is infinite in holiness and perfect in every way. God is all powerful and all knowing and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. God eternally exists in three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:16-17; 28:19). These three are one in essence, equal in power and glory, but distinct in person and function.

C. Jesus Christ

We believe Christ is the eternal Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was begotten by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, and became Man (Luke 1:34-35), without ceasing to be God. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ lived a perfect, sinless life, and died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). We believe that He rose from the dead bodily in fulfillment of the Scriptures (Psalm 16:10; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). We believe that He ascended into heaven where He lives forever as God and Man making intercession for us as High Priest (Hebrews 9:23-28).

D. Man

We believe that man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27) that he sinned, and thereby incurred, not only physical death, but also that spiritual death which is separation from God (Genesis 3:19); and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature and are sinners in thought, word, and deed (Romans 3:23; 5:12). Furthermore we believe that God is the Creator of the Universe and of every living thing (Genesis 1:1; Romans 1:20). Neither man nor any living creature “evolved” or are “evolving” into any different form than that which He originally made them.

E. Salvation Through Christ Alone

We believe that all who receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ as the Only means to eternal life with God are born again of, and indwelt by, the Holy Spirit, thereby becoming the children of God (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:9-10). Once a person believes in Jesus as Savior, they are eternally secure in their salvation (John 10:28-30; Romans 8:38-39; Ephesians 1:13-14).

F. The Bodily Resurrection

We believe in the bodily resurrection, (2 Corinthians 4:14), the future eternal hope of Glory for those who have been regenerated in Christ, and the eternal punishment of those outside of Christ (Revelation 20:11-15).

G. Christian Life

We believe that all Christians (those who have received Jesus Christ by faith) are called into holy, Spirit-filled living (1 Peter 1:15-16; Galatians 5:16). This would require being in-tune with God's Word and Spirit, and abstaining from sinful, worldly practices that are in contrast with what God says (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; Romans 1:26-27).

H. The “Blessed Hope”

We believe in “that blessed hope” (Titus 2:13) the personal, imminent and pre-millennial return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:11-20:6).

I. The Church

We believe that the church, the Body of Christ, is made up of all who truly believe (Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13), who have been born again of the Spirit (John 3:3-5). We believe that the local church is an assembly of professing, baptized believers in Jesus Christ who join together for the purpose of carrying out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20). We believe that the local church is a self-governing body of believers who are under the authority of the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16) and of Jesus Christ as the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22).

J. Baptism

We believe that water baptism by immersion is an ordinance to be observed by believers in obedience to the Lord's command (Matthew 28:19). We believe baptism is a public proclamation of our faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, Jesus Christ, symbolizing our death to sin and our resurrection to new life that occurred when we believed in Christ and were immediately baptized by the Spirit (Romans 6:1-7). Water baptism is not a means to salvation.

ARTICLE VI: GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Hickory Creek Community Church shall thus function as an independent, conservative evangelical church, committed to the fundamental, historic truths recorded in God's inerrant revelation—the Holy Scriptures. To hold a leadership position within Hickory Creek Community Church, one must wholeheartedly agree with the Doctrinal Statement, Article V, outlined in this constitution. (Amended 12/3/2006)

The government of Hickory Creek Community Church is vested in the members who compose the local body under the headship of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 18:20; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:16; 5:21; Colossians. 1:18; 2:19).

Executive authority or leadership, however, is vested by the congregation, as authorized by Scripture, in Elders who lead the church and to whom the congregation is to submit under the headship of Christ. These men have the authority and responsibility to delegate, to individuals or committees, authority and responsibility to carry out the business or ministry of the church in spiritual and physical (material) matters (Acts 20:28; 15:6; Ephesians 4:11-12; Philippians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

In using its delegated authority, and in making its decisions, the Elders must seek to be guided by the Scripture, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and by input from the congregation (Acts 20:32; 6:2-5a; 11:22; 15:22; 2 Corinthians 8:19).

In the event of the misuse of the delegated authority, the church has recourse to the principles as set forth in Articles VII, XIII, and XVI.

ARTICLE VII: ELDERS

The recognized offices of Hickory Creek Community Church are Elders and Deacons. While roles and functions within these offices may differ based upon giftings, these remain the only 2 offices that the Bible speaks of.

A. Elders (General)

1. Qualifications

Elders shall be men whose lives are characterized by the qualities set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. These qualities are outlined as follows:

- (1) Elders must **desire** (1 Timothy 3:1) the office of elder and demonstrate spiritual leadership abilities among the flock.
- (2) Elders must be **above reproach** (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6) in their life as a whole and especially the areas delineated in these passages.
- (3) Elders must be the **husband of one wife** (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), being a faithful husband if he is married.
- (4) Elders must be **men of character** (described by the following) which is of utmost importance in being able to be an effective elder.

Elders must be “temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable,...not violent, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money...must also have a good reputation with outsiders so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.” (1 Timothy 3:2-3, 7)

Elders must “not be overbearing, not quick-tempered...not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain... must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.” (Titus 1:7-8)

An elder “must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

Elders must shepherd the flock of God “serving as overseers-not because you must but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:2-3)

- (5) Elders must be **able to teach** (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9) communicating God’s Word in varied settings within the church.
- (6) Elders must **not be given to drunkenness** (1 Timothy 3:3; Titus 1:7).
- (7) Elders must **manage their families well** (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Titus 1:6). An elder who cannot lead his own family, will not be able to lead the family of God.
- (8) Elders shall hold to the doctrinal statement of this Constitution in accord with the statements of Article V, and be supportive of the entire Constitution.

2. Authority

The ministry of Hickory Creek Community Church shall be under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ working in and through the elders, deacons and members of the church.

The elders will be the primary decision-making body within the church. However, it is critical that the elders make decisions based on carefully assembled facts, scriptural insight, the individual and corporate leading by the Holy Spirit, and input from the body (Acts 6:2-6; 15:6, 22; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

The church is not a democracy or a government where the majority rules. Jesus Christ Himself is the Head and Ruler of the church. However, the Lord Jesus leads and directs through both the body and the elders. Since the Lord Jesus dwells in each member of the body of Christ, and will lead and direct through the body as well as the elders as to needs, desires, and responsibilities for each local body, it is important and necessary for the elders to seek input from the body, especially on practical matters of church life. As a result of these biblical facts, **in major decisions of church life**, such as the addition of elders or deacons, the approval of the annual budget, decisions concerning the sale or purchase of real estate, and amendments to this constitution, the congregation will affirm decisions made by the elders to show a unified movement toward the direction in question and to show a sense of God's leading.

3. Duties & Expectations

Because of external and internal Christian testimony to be promoted with the local body, the elders must first and foremost exercise a personal spiritual walk which promotes self-examination, maintain a servant-like quality in life, and serve with gentleness and humility in all that he does. Out of this biblical perspective, the elder is to joyfully undertake the following duties:

- (1) Elders are expected to have an on-going maintaining of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 qualifications.
- (2) Elders are expected to be in regular attendance at Weekend Worship Services.
- (3) Elders are expected to attend Eldership and appropriate Leadership meetings.
- (4) Elders are expected to be leading or attending a small group Bible Study through the ministry of Hickory Creek Community Church.
- (5) Elders are expected to have a key involvement leading, shepherding, and/or teaching at least one on-going ministry. (Elders are to have shown they can handle the word of God as a teacher.)
- (6) Elders are expected to be building intentional, on-going, intimate, inter-personal relationships within the body of Christ at Hickory Creek.
- (7) Elders are expected to tithe.
- (8) Elders are not to be given to drunkenness. We recognize that drinking in our society has become a major problem, therefore in keeping with the Romans 14 mandate not to be a stumbling block, we ask all elders to use great discretion and err on the side of discretion in their exercise of this freedom so as not to hinder the ministry.
- (9) Elders are expected to embrace and believe Hickory Creek's doctrinal statement and beliefs (as outlined in Article V of this constitution) and be on-the-same-page philosophically with the rest of the eldership.
- (10) Elders are expected to give themselves to prayer and ministry of the Word.
- (11) Elders are expected to guard and protect the flock.
- (12) Elders are expected to oversee and provide spiritual direction for the activities and growth of the flock.

The elders shall strive to maintain open communication with the church body, both to discern needs, concerns and viewpoints, and to communicate information and decisions. This may be done through the Sunday bulletin, pulpit announcements, group or congregational meetings and discussions, church votes, and one-on-one personal contact (Acts 6:1-5; 11:22; 15:1, 6, 22; 16:2).

4. Appointment (General Principles)

The Scriptures emphasize that elders in the church are not appointed by men, but by God (Acts 20:28). The task of the people in the church then should be to seek and discover God's direction and leading within the church body in the appointment of elders.

The need for additional Elders, must be recognized by the current elders. The elders shall seek to discern the nature of the need and to follow God's leading in deciding if the need justifies the appointment of an elder. Upon a decision by the Elders that a need does exist, the church will prayerfully and carefully seek God's direction in choosing the right man or men. It requires a three-fourths majority of those members voting to affirm the decision to bring on a new elder. At no time can paid staff comprise more than 1/3 of the eldership.

5. Tenure

Elders (other than the Lead Pastor) are appointed for a period of two years at which time they will have to be reaffirmed by the congregation. An Elder may choose to take a sabbatical after their term, but one is not required. At the end of their term, Elders should assess their continued desire and ability to serve. If they feel they desire to and are able to, and that is affirmed by the other elders, then they should seek to be reaffirmed. If not, they should take a sabbatical. The removal of an elder from office shall be effected by personal resignation, inability to carry out the duties and expectations, or by disciplinary actions in accordance with the following:

a. Voluntary Resignation

An elder may resign at any time. Each elder should prayerfully reflect on this decision and seek counsel from the other elders before making a final decision.

b. Inability to Meet Duties and Expectations

If an elder ceases to be able to carry out the duties and expectations as outlined above, an elder may be dismissed by 2/3 majority of members voting at a meeting called specifically for that purpose. This is not a disciplinary action.

c. Disciplinary Dismissal

Dismissal of any elder for a disciplinary action will be in accordance with the instruction of 1 Timothy 5:19-20; Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-18. If an elder's sin is such that the other elders feel it necessitates dismissal from office, they shall remove him from office and notify the church members. It shall require a 2/3's majority vote of the elders, excluding the elder in question, to remove an elder from office.

ARTICLE VIII: STAFF

A. Lead Pastor

The man who serves as Lead Pastor shall also serve as an elder while serving in this staff role. While the church is under the leadership of the eldership as a whole, there are those who have stronger leadership and teaching gifts, even among the elders. This Lead Pastor plays a critical role in the growth, maturity, spirituality and effectiveness of the church. He is responsible to a large extent for the quality and content of much of the teaching within the congregation (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Timothy 4:6-16) as well as taking a major role in providing direction and vision for the church. When a vacancy occurs in this role, a search committee shall be formed by the remaining elders and deacons. This team can include other members of the congregation who have been members for at least 1 year. When a candidate has been chosen by the search team with the elders and deacons approval, he shall be recommended to the congregation and the congregation shall vote. Hickory Creek Community Church recognizes that the role of Lead Pastor is of critical importance to the church and any man who will occupy this role, even someone who is already an elder, will have to be affirmed by three-fourths of the congregation who votes on it. The removal of the Lead Pastor shall require 2/3's of the eldership with confirmation by a simple majority of the congregation present at a meeting called for the purpose of removing the Lead Pastor.

1. Duties, Qualifications and Authority

The duties, qualifications and authority of the Lead Pastor shall be the same as for any other elder (Article VII, A), with the following additional duties:

- (1) Provide the majority of the teaching during weekend worship services (1 Timothy 4:13).
- (2) Provide direction to the Eldership and leadership teams concerning church business and spiritual concerns within the body.
- (3) Provide day to day leadership for all other staff members.

B. Additional Pastoral Staff

The need for additional paid pastoral staff to assist in meeting the needs of the church must be recognized by the eldership. The need for this expenditure should be affirmed by the membership through the budget process.

The qualifications of any additional pastoral staff members shall be the same as for elders (Article VII, A, 1). All paid pastoral staff will look to the Lead Pastor for supervision of their duties and for periodic reviews of their performance. The tenure and removal of any additional pastoral staff member shall be at the discretion of the eldership.

1. Duties

The duties of associate pastoral staff will be developed on an individual basis as the need arises. The elders will outline the duties of each associate pastoral staff member.

2. Expectations

- (1) Staff Pastors are expected to have an on-going maintaining of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 qualifications.
- (2) Staff Pastors are expected to be in attendance at Weekend Worship Services.
- (3) Staff Pastors are expected to attend Eldership and appropriate Leadership meetings.
- (4) Staff Pastors are expected to be leading or attending an ongoing small group Bible Study through the ministry of Hickory Creek Community Church.
- (5) Staff Pastors are expected to have involvement leading, shepherding, and/or teaching at least one on-going ministry.

- (6) Staff Pastors are expected to be building intentional, on-going, intimate, inter-personal relationships within the body—though having a heart towards all...exhibiting no prejudice.
- (7) Staff Pastors are expected to tithe.
- (8) Staff Pastors are not to be given to drunkenness. We recognize that drinking in our society has become a major problem, therefore in keeping with the Romans 14 mandate not to be a stumbling block we ask all Associate Pastoral staff to use great discretion and err on the side of discretion in their exercise of this freedom so as not to hinder the ministry.
- (9) Associate Pastors are expected to embrace and believe Hickory Creek Community Church's doctrinal statement and beliefs (as outlined in Article V of this constitution) and be on-the-same-page philosophically with the eldership.

C. Ministry Directors

The hiring of any ministry directors will be planned for and directed by the Elders in accordance with the approved budget. It is not just anyone who can be a Ministry Director. A person who is appointed or hired to a Ministry Director position must be faithful to the church through attendance, ministry participation and support. Specific expectations for Ministry Directors will be determined by the specific ministry a person leads. General qualifications and expectations are as follows:

- (1) Ministry Leaders can be a man or woman.
- (2) Ministry Leaders are expected to be in regular attendance at Weekend Worship Services.
- (3) Ministry Leaders are expected to be part of a Connection Group or Bible study through Hickory Creek
- (4) Ministry Leaders are expected to tithe.
- (5) Ministry Leaders are expected to embrace and believe Hickory Creek Community Church's doctrinal statement and beliefs (as outlined in Article V of this constitution) and be on-the-same-page philosophically with the eldership.

D. Support Staff

The hiring of any non-pastoral support staff will be planned for and directed by the Elders in accordance with the approved budget. Requirement to be hired in this role is to be a current member of Hickory Creek.

ARTICLE IX: DEACONS

A. Qualifications

Deacons shall be men who desire to be servants of the local church body, who are able to serve, who meet all the qualifications of Scripture set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-12 and outlined as follows:

- (1) Deacons must be **men worthy of respect** (1 Timothy 3:8), being honorable and being known (Acts 6:3) to the people they serve.
- (2) Deacons must be **full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom** (Acts 6:3). They must be men who are wise and strong in the faith.
- (3) Deacons must be **dignified, sincere** (1 Timothy 3:8). They must be men of their word and be able to keep a confidence.
- (4) Deacons must **not indulge in much wine** (1 Timothy 3:8). We recognize that drinking in our society has become a major problem, therefore in keeping with the Romans 14 mandate not to be a stumbling block, we ask all Deacons to use great discretion and err on the side of discretion in their exercise of this freedom so as not to hinder the ministry
- (5) Deacons must **not pursue dishonest gain** (1 Timothy 3:8). They must be reputable in business dealings.
- (6) Deacons must **keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience** (1 Timothy 3:9) and **be tested...with nothing found against them** (1 Timothy 3:10). They must live their lives in accordance with the faith and it must be evident in their living.
- (7) Deacons must be the **husband of one wife** (1 Timothy 3:12), being a faithful husband if he is married.
- (8) Deacons must manage **their children and their households well** (1 Timothy 3:12).
- (9) If a Deacon is married, their wife must be **worthy of respect, not a malicious talker, temperate, trustworthy in everything** (1 Timothy 3:11). The wife of a Deacon must be honorable like her husband and not a gossip. She needs to be emotionally in control and committed to the ministry of her husband and the church.

B. Duties & Expectations

In Acts 6:1-4, certain men were appointed to minister to the physical needs of the flock, to relieve the elders so they would have more time to concentrate on prayer and on the Word. These were undoubtedly the first deacons and functioned as helpers to the leaders of the Jerusalem church.

Deacons shall be helpers of the elders in ministering to the needs of the body, especially the physical needs, though they may serve in other capacities as their gifts and training allow.

Their specific duties of each Deacon will be designated by the elders according to the need of the church and a deacon's particular gifts, capacities and talents. The general expectations of all Deacons are as follows:

- (1) Deacons are expected to have an on-going maintaining of 1 Timothy 3:8-12 qualifications.
- (2) Deacons are expected to be in attendance at Weekend Worship Services.
- (3) Deacons are expected to be in attendance at scheduled Leadership meetings.
- (4) Deacons are expected to be in attendance and involved in a Bible study through the ministry of Hickory Creek.
- (5) Deacons are expected to tithe.
- (6) Deacons are expected to be building intentional, on-going, intimate, inter-personal relationships.
- (7) Deacons are expected to embrace and believe Hickory Creek Community Church's doctrinal statement and beliefs (as outlined in Article V of this constitution) and be on-the-same-page philosophically with the eldership.

C. Appointment

Deacons shall be appointed to serve as long as they are qualified and willing to serve and as long as a need for their ministry exists. First Timothy 3:10 teaches that potential deacons are to be tested. The primary means of testing is time; time for the flock to evaluate a man's commitment to the Lord, his qualifications according to 1 Timothy 3:8-12, his doctrinal understanding and his willingness to serve the local body. The flock and the Pastor/Elders should be on the alert to those men who demonstrate the qualifications of a deacon.

In the New Testament church, both the church leaders and the flock played an important role in choosing deacons (Acts 6:1-6). Deacons will be appointed as the need arises. However, only qualified and willing men will be appointed. If no qualified men are available, or if those qualified are unable or unwilling to serve, no appointment will be made. The church shall wait on the Lord to provide a qualified man or men to meet the need.

The following outlines the procedure Hickory Creek Community Church will follow in selecting deacons:

- (1) The Elders shall decide if the need for a deacon(s) exists.
- (2) When there is a need, then the Elders shall notify the congregation of the need and ask them to recommend to the Elders those men whom they believe meet the qualifications.
- (3) The Elders will review the names submitted to them along with any additional names of men they believe to be qualified.
- (4) Each name submitted will be carefully and prayerfully considered and reviewed according to their qualifications, gifts, the need, and the individual's willingness to serve.
- (5) Those men willing and qualified will be presented to the church and they will be affirmed by the congregation by a vote. A three-fourths majority of those members voting is needed to be affirmed. Once affirmed by the congregation, the elders shall appoint these men to the position of Deacon.

D. Tenure

Deacons are appointed for a period of two years at which time they will have to be reaffirmed by the congregation. A deacon may choose to take a sabbatical after their term, but one is not required. At the end of their term, Deacons should assess their continued desire and ability to serve. If they feel they desire to and are able to, and that is affirmed by the other deacons and elders, then they should seek to be reaffirmed. If not, they should take a sabbatical. The removal of a deacon from office shall be effected by personal resignation, inability to carry out the duties and expectations, or by disciplinary actions in accordance with the following:

a. Voluntary Resignation

A deacon may resign at any time. Each deacon should prayerfully reflect on this decision and seek counsel from the elders before making a final decision.

b. Inability to Meet Duties and Expectations

If a deacon ceases to be able to carry out the duties and expectations as outlined above, a deacon may be dismissed by a majority consent of the elders. This is not a disciplinary action.

c. Disciplinary Dismissal

Dismissal of any deacon for a disciplinary action will be determined by a majority of the eldership and in accordance with the instruction of Matthew 18:15-18 and Galatians 6:1.

ARTICLE X: LAY LEADERS

A Lay Leader is a member of the church who is appointed by the elders to lead a specific ministry. It is not just anyone who is a lay leader. A person who is appointed to a lay leadership position must have evidenced faithfulness to the church through attendance, ministry participation and support. Those who become lay leaders over specific ministries or as part of the leadership team shall be determined and appointed by the elders. Specific expectations for each lay leader will be determined by the specific ministry a person leads. General qualifications and expectations are as follows:

- (1) Lay Leaders can be a man or woman.
- (2) Lay Leaders are expected to be in regular attendance at Weekend Worship Services.
- (3) Lay Leaders are expected to be part of a Connection Group or Bible study through Hickory Creek
- (4) Lay Leaders are expected to tithe.
- (5) Lay Leaders are expected to embrace and believe Hickory Creek Community Church's doctrinal statement and beliefs (as outlined in Article V of this constitution) and be on-the-same-page philosophically with the eldership.

ARTICLE XI: TRUSTEES

The Trustees of the corporation of Hickory Creek Community Church shall be the elders and deacons and all legal documents shall require the signature of 2 Trustees. If at any point there are less than 2 elders and deacons combined, a trustee may be elected by the body, from those within the membership, to serve as trustee. When the number of combined elders and deacons reaches 2, a separate office of trustee will cease. (Amended 12-3-06)

ARTICLE XII: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

A. Union in the Universal Body of Christ

At the time of personal faith in Jesus Christ, the believer is called into the fellowship of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Corinthians 1:2, 9; 12:12-13, 20; Colossians 1:18), and joined into union with the universal body of Christ, the church, by the baptizing work of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Colossians 1:18).

B. Union With a Local Assembly of Believers

There is another aspect of this fellowship into which the believer is joined. He is brought into the fellowship of fellow members of that body, other living believers on earth that he might share and participate in the various blessings and ministries of the body of Christ. For this to occur properly, believers are to seek the fellowship of one another in a local body or assembly of believers to which they are to become responsible. (1 Corinthians. 1:2; 1 Thessalonians. 1:1; 2 Thessalonians. 1:1).

A believer in isolation, operating independently of other believers of a local assembly, is an idea contrary to Scripture. Scripture teaches that there are to be local assemblies of believers, united together by a common faith, by union in Christ, and the universal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, by common purposes, commitments and responsibilities, and with a common leadership of that specific body, independent in government from other local assemblies (Ephesians 4:4-6; 1 Peter 5:1-3; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Heb. 13:7, 17; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). The local church is to be a body of people allotted to the charge of elders (1 Peter 5:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 5:11; Hebrews 10:14-15; 1 Peter 4:8-10; 1 Corinthians 12:20-27), and subject to the discipline of that body or assembly (1 Corinthians 5:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:14 [admonish the unruly], 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14; 1 Timothy 5:20).

This of necessity implies more than a loose relationship of a believer or believers to a particular body or assembly. It involves a tie, an involvement, a commitment, responsibility and submission to both the leadership and to each other.

C. Church Membership

Every believer in Jesus Christ needs to become identified and committed to a specific local assembly of believers following the leading and direction of God. This commitment is revealed by their attitude, faith, attendance, involvement, giving and submission to that assembly. Thus, a membership roll cannot, in and of itself, serve as the sole means of commitment a believer has to a local body. Hickory Creek Community Church maintains a membership roll to aid in conducting business of the church in an orderly manner. The simple fact of being a member does not indicate maturity or growth, though it is an important tool in helping the church function smoothly.

D. Requirements for Membership

- (1) Members must believe in and have received Jesus Christ as their personal Savior.
- (2) Members must have been baptized by immersion as a symbol of their association with Christ in His death and resurrection.
- (3) Members are to have completed our New Members Class so they may know the basics of the faith that we believe and teach and be in agreement with it.
- (4) Members must be in agreement with the doctrine of Hickory Creek Community Church.
- (5) Members need to affirm these requirements through our written membership agreement.

Membership at Hickory Creek Community Church is ongoing as long as the person is in continuous fellowship with the church. If a member has not been in attendance for **6 months**, that member shall be moved to inactive status. Before a member is moved to inactive status, attempts will be made to contact that person and minister to them and bring them back into fellowship. (These provisions do not include those who are home or hospital bound due to medical conditions or those who are in temporary residence (less than 6 months) elsewhere, but remain in contact with the church.) Members may also be removed from membership by the member's choice to be removed or church discipline (Article XIII). To be moved from inactive back to an active member requires that the person re-attend a membership class and resubmit a new membership agreement affirming the membership requirements have been met. (Amended 12-3-06)

E. Affirmation and Congregational Meetings

The purpose of affirming decisions is not to simply obtain a "majority-rules" consensus. Rather, all affirmations in this church are designed to show God's leading within the body on an issue. Unless specifically indicated differently within the Constitution, a majority decision of those members casting ballots in favor of an issue shall signify to the church leadership that the body agrees that God is leading favorably in the decision being affirmed. If a majority decision in favor is not achieved, the leadership will not move forward on that issue.

Any member of the church who is at least 18 years old may cast a ballot. The person may cast a ballot in person or they may do so absentee. An absentee ballot is valid if the person writes down on any piece of paper the issue being affirmed, their decision on the issue, and their signature. Absentee ballots must be turned in to an elder or deacon no later than the date of the meeting.

The means of affirming a decision will normally be by written ballot. This may vary, however, if the leadership announces the form to be used when the date of the meeting is announced. The membership will be advised of the date and time of a meeting for a decision at least 7 days prior to the meeting and announced during 2 Sunday morning services.

ARTICLE XIII: CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

We believe in the responsibility and necessity of church discipline as clearly outlined in Scripture. It is a very difficult area and hard to practice. Nevertheless, church discipline has the divine authority of Scripture and is vital to the purity of the church. In church discipline, the following matters must be carefully understood and applied.

A. The Pattern and Basis for Discipline

The discipline of the church is first patterned after the fact that the Lord Himself disciplines His children (Hebrews 12:6) and, as a father delegates part of the discipline of the children to the wife, so the Lord has delegated the discipline of the church family to the church itself.

Discipline is further based on the holy character of God (1 Peter 1:16; Hebrews 12:11). The pattern of God's holiness, his desire for the church to be holy, set apart unto Him, is an important reason for the necessity of church discipline. The church is therefore to clean out the leaven of malice and wickedness from its ranks (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). A failure to discipline in a church today evidences a lack of awareness of the holiness of God.

Church discipline must be patterned after and based on the divine commands of Scripture. We have numerous passages which both command and give us biblical directives on the how, when and where of church discipline. Failing to exercise this responsibility demonstrates a lack of obedience and belief in the authority of the Bible (1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Matthew 18:17-18; Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 1 Timothy 5:20; Galatians 6:1).

A final basis for the necessity of church discipline is the testimony of the church in the world. The world observes the behavior and life of the church. When the church acts no differently than the world it loses its credibility and authenticity (1 Peter 2:11-18; 3:8-16; 4:1-4).

B. The Purposes of Church Discipline

- (1) Concern for the glory of God and the testimony of the congregation.
- (2) The restoration and building up of the sinning believer.
- (3) The purity of the local body and its protection from moral and doctrinally impure influences, knowing a little leaven can leaven the entire lump (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).

C. The Practice of Church Discipline

1. When it is to be Practiced

Great care must be exercised here. Scripture does not warrant the exercise of church discipline for an individual or a church's pet taboos or peeves. According to Scripture, there are five categories which warrant church discipline. These are:

- a. Difficulties between members (Matthew 18:15-17).
- b. Divisiveness, which is someone causing divisions in the church (Romans 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11).
- c. Disorderly conduct which is conduct clearly out of line with the prescribed commands of Scripture (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15).
- d. Sins of the type mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5: incest, sexual immorality, covetousness, idolatry, abusive speech, drunkenness, and swindling (1 Corinthians 5:1, 11).
- e. False teaching. Erroneous teaching and views which concern the fundamentals of the faith, not lesser differences of interpretation (1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17-18; Romans 16:17-18).

The key concerns here are: (a) the holy character of God, (b) the testimony of the church, (c) the effect upon the unity and purity of the members, and (d) the edification and restoration of the individual.

2. How it is to be Practiced

Scriptural procedure here is clear and specific steps are prescribed. They are as follows:

- a. It must be done in the spirit of humility, gentleness and patience, looking to yourself lest you too be tempted (Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Timothy 2:24-25).
- b. It must be recognized that it is an offense which calls for discipline. Again, the Word is our criterion.
- c. Seek private correction and/or reconciliation with the offender (Matt. 18:15). This is when the problem involves two believers. The one offended or the one who recognizes the offense is to go privately and try to rectify the problem. If this fails, he is to take witnesses, preferably spiritual leaders, so that if it has to be brought before the whole church it can be firmly proven or established (Matt. 18:16-17).
- d. Seek reconciliation through the spiritual leadership if the problem involves an offense that is against the whole body, or is a threat to its unity. Initiatory action following the concept of Galatians 6:1 should be taken by the mature spiritual leaders of the church rather than by just one person. "You who are spiritual" in Galatians 6:1 is plural meaning literally, "you, the spiritual ones ..." These initial contacts provide opportunity for loving admonition, correction and forgiveness. On the other hand, if these first steps are not heeded, it constitutes a warning that further action will be taken and gives occasion for serious rebuke (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-14; Titus 2:15; 3:10).
- e. Seek reconciliation through the whole body. If further action is necessary, it is to be taken before the whole church (Matt. 18:17). If there is not a response in repentance and obedience to the word of the church, the individual will be removed from membership and fellowship of the people will be withdrawn until such a time as the offending individual repents and seeks restoration.

In essence then, this is the action of the Lord carrying out discipline through the action of the whole body through the leadership of the elders or the spiritually mature (1 Corinthians 5:4 "in the name of our Lord Jesus, when you are assembled...with the power of our Lord Jesus ..."). Similar heavenly authority is seen in the ratification of this disciplinary action as spelled out in Matthew 18:18-19.

ARTICLE XIV: FINANCES

A budget for the church shall be prepared annually. The budget shall be presented to the church for affirmation. Recognizing that things can change throughout the year due to growth and unforeseen opportunities, this constitution gives the eldership authority to exceed the budget by up to 7.5% at their discretion for priorities that arise during the year. Monies shall be paid out in accordance with these guidelines. (Amended 12-3-06).

All checks written by Hickory Creek Community Church shall require two signatures. Authorized signors for checks may include the elders, the deacons, the clerk, the treasurer and or trustees or any others that the elders appoint.

ARTICLE XV: ORDINATION & LICENSING

It shall be within the power of this church to ordain and license into the Gospel Ministry those men whom God has called and gifted. The Elders and Deacons shall have authority, with the approval of the congregation, to ordain and issue proper credentials.

ARTICLE XVI: GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

Suggestions and proposals from the congregation can be a vital and healthy avenue by which the leadership may minister to the rest of the body. When handled scripturally, this type of communication edifies the body, ministers to the needs of the congregation, helps preserve and promote unity within the church and brings glory to God.

Following the principles outlined above, any member of the church who has a disagreement about any policy or procedure promoted by the church or its leadership, should as a first step, prayerfully and privately approach the elders. This may be done through informal consultation with an elder, by means of a signed letter to the Elders, or meeting with the Elders at the church member's request. It is recognized that these steps should be taken prior to public discussion of any issue so as to help the leadership minister to the body more effectively and to help avoid discord and disunity within the congregation (Proverbs 13:3; 16:27-28).

The church leadership should seek to prayerfully accept and address any disagreement or complaint thus presented and seek to resolve the issue in a manner which best promotes those benefits mentioned above.

ARTICLE XVII: AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended or replaced when the need for change is recognized by the elders and the members of the church body. At the time such need is believed to be present, the elders, after consultation with the body, shall make provisional modification in light of Scripture and all essential information on this matter shall be communicated to the congregation in written form, providing adequate time for study and response. A date will be proposed for acceptance of the revisions at a congregational meeting. The congregation will then vote to see if there is a unity of acceptance and understanding of the amendments according to Article XII, Section E. If so, the amendments to the Constitution will become effective.

ARTICLE XVIII: DISSOLUTION OF PROPERTY

In the event this church body is dissolved, disbands or ceases to function as a church for any reason, the title to all property and assets shall be given to another church that is like-minded in doctrine and philosophy, chosen by the membership. The decision to dissolve or disband must be approved by three-fourths of the membership of the congregation by means of the procedure outlined in Article XII, Section E.