

Constitution

Santa Teresa Baptist Church
Santa Teresa, New Mexico

Book 1 - Membership

PREAMBLE

The members of the Santa Teresa Baptist Church establish the following articles to which we voluntarily submit ourselves.

ARTICLE I - NAME

The name of this church shall be “First Baptist Church of Santa Teresa, New Mexico”, doing business as (dba) Santa Teresa Baptist Church (STBC). We adopt the name Santa Teresa Baptist Church to indicate that we are a neighborhood church seeking to glorify God in the community we live.

ARTICLE II - PURPOSE

The purpose of this church is to glorify God through reverent worship, proclaiming Christ to sinners, and building up our members through preaching the whole counsel of God. As God enables us, we seek to advance the kingdom of God through the proclamation of God’s Law and Gospel, baptizing and making disciples of all who come to faith in Christ, equipping the saints through Bible instruction and study, administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and seeking to minister relief to those in need especially among the saints.

ARTICLE III - ARTICLES OF FAITH

We adopt, as the fullest expression of our faith, *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* with the below exception. This confession aligns us theologically and doctrinally with our Reformed Baptist forefathers. We accept this confession not as an authoritative rule or code of faith, but to assist us in examining prospective officers, in resolving controversy and as a means of instruction in righteousness. In this confession the members of

our church have a summary of the doctrines we hold dear with Scriptural proofs to assist them in the defense of the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Exception to the confession:

Chapter 26, paragraph 4 will read only that: The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church, in whom, by the appointment of the Father, all power for calling, institution, order or government of the church, is invested in a supreme and sovereign manner.

Reason: While the Papal office may be the seat of antichrists, we do not affirm that the Pope is THE antichrist (1 John 2:18) or THE man of lawlessness/son of perdition (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). There is no sufficient exegetical basis to make this assertion.

ARTICLE IV – MEMBERSHIP

Section 1 – The Warrant for Church Membership

There are many churches and Christian individuals that claim the Bible is silent on the subject of church membership. However, we believe that The New Testament presents the local church as a distinct and defined group of individuals gathered together to worship God and carry out the commands of our Lord Jesus Christ. The local church is made up of individuals who may be counted, added to and even subtracted from. Each local church of Christ is called upon to select leaders from within, thus making it a formal organization with a recognized government.

Section 2 – The Meaning of Membership. To be a member of a church is to make a public promise to live according to the Word and to support the work of the congregation. In the Bible this is called a covenant. Every believer is an organic part of the universal church, the redeemed body of Christ. But only by a public promise can you become part of the local church. A public promise, or covenant, is the basis for all society. Marriage, employment, citizenship, church membership, etc., are all relationships of accountability.

Membership in a church is not like membership in a social club or other organizations. Most organization members are consumers—the organization exists to serve them. The Church of Christ is a completely different community. Membership means ministry and service—going

from being a consumer to becoming a provider of God's love and care to others. We take seriously that we are a church not for ourselves, but for others. Every person who joins the church takes upon himself the responsibility to cultivate friendship and cooperation with all the members of the church.

Section 3 – Requirements for Membership. Any person shall be eligible for membership in this church who (1) professes repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; (2) who manifests a life transformed by the power of Christ; (3) who has been baptized by immersion in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; (4) who expresses substantial agreement with the confession of faith and constitution of our church; (5) who intends to give whole hearted encouragement and support to its ministry; and (6) who is willing to submit to its government and discipline.

Any person who satisfies the requirements for membership may be received into the membership of the church. Membership will begin when the covenant membership vows have been taken. Any change in the status of membership shall be determined by the eldership. If at any time a member has a change in doctrine or ministerial philosophy that invalidates their eligibility for membership they shall notify the elders immediately.

Section 4 – Procedure for Receiving New Members.

Step 1: Application for membership – STBC does not seek to rush people into membership. We want to allow sufficient time for people to inform themselves with the doctrine and culture of our church. A person that desires to become a member of the church shall submit to the elders a completed membership application form. Part of this application shall include a written testimony of his/her faith in Christ, and a statement indicating his substantial agreement with the confession and constitution of the church.

Step 2: Eldership Review – Upon receipt of the application for membership, the elders will make a determination as to whether to continue, postpone, or terminate the process. In the case where the applicant is, or has been, a member of another church, special effort will be made to determine their present standing in that church and identify the reasons for their leaving. If the elders of the applicant's former church

raise any valid objections, the membership process may be postponed or terminated.

Step 3: Congregational Review – The elders shall announce, no less than two weeks in advance, a time and date that an applicant shall make a public testimony of their faith in Christ and their approval of the church’s constitution and confession of faith. The church will be given no less than one week to bring any questions, concerns, objections or words of encouragement about the applicant to the elders, privately. If, after an appropriate investigation, any concerns or objections are valid, the elders may postpone or terminate the process.

Step 4: Membership Vows - Membership means that you commit yourself to the local church and that you agree to participate in the life, ministry, and government of our church. Therefore, all applicants approved for membership must affirm, before the congregation, the following promises as a vow to the Lord:

Vow 1: Do you acknowledge yourself to be a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving His wrath, and without hope except through his sovereign mercy?

Vow 2: Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God, and only Savior of sinners, and do you receive and rest upon him alone for salvation as he is offered in the gospel?

Vow 3: Have you been baptized in accordance to the Word, by immersion in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Vow 4: Do you now resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, that you will endeavor to live as becomes a follower of Christ?

Vow 5: Do you, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, promise to walk together in Christian love; to sustain the Church in its worship and work; and to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry to the best of your ability?

Vow 6: Do you promise to submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church; to welcome, and test biblically instruction from the Scriptures by the elders of the church while seeking to grow toward biblical unity in the truth?

Step 5: Congregational Vote – Following the membership vows, a three-fourths vote of those members present and voting shall be required for acceptance into church membership.

Section 5 – Release or Transfer of Membership.

By Death – When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, their name shall be removed from the membership roll.

By Transfer – Letters of recommendation for members in good standing shall be granted by the eldership to churches which request them. If any member requests to be released from membership while there are active disciplinary proceedings against him, the elders shall delay acting on the request until the disciplinary matter is resolved. When a letter or recommendation has been granted, the relationship with our church shall be considered terminated.

By Exclusion – If a member is habitually absent from the fellowship of this church without just cause, or requests severance of membership, or concludes he is not a Christian, or relocates and has broken off contact with church; he or she may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the elders.

The church shall have authority to refuse a member’s voluntary resignation or transfer of membership to another church, when its purpose is to circumvent the process of church discipline, or for any other biblical reason.

ARTICLE V – CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Purpose – “Church discipline is the right and privilege of every church member” (Jay Adams.) The purpose of church discipline is two-fold: (1) to maintain the purity of the church as a whole, and (2) to encourage the offending member to turn from their sinful behavior and seek restoration and renewed covenantal faithfulness. When a member strays from their moral duty, corrective discipline is applied with the hope of reconciling and restoring them.

Corrective Discipline –

A. **Informal:** The ordinary course of discipline in our congregation should be informal. Members are encouraged to pursue self-discipline, overlooking the failings of others in love (1 Peter 4:8). When sinned against,

members are to privately encourage an offending member to covenant faithfulness (Matthew 18:15). Stubborn offenders may be confronted with the assistance of two or three witnesses (Matthew 18:16).

B. Formal: Formal church discipline must always have as its goal a loving and prayerful concern for the full restoration of the offender. Formal discipline is applied when, in the unanimous judgment of the elders, individual private admonition has failed. Except in cases of scandal requiring immediate action, the pattern of formal church discipline may include: a private verbal admonishment by two or three (Matthew 18:16); a public admonishment (rebuke) and suspension from the Lord's Table and voting rights for a definite period of time (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15); or a formal hearing resulting in excommunication (Matthew 18:17).

Scandalous Sin – If a member has sinned scandalously but shows hopeful signs of repentance, including submission to the admonition of the elders, it would be wrong to excommunicate him. It may still be necessary, however, to suspend him for a time from some of the privileges of membership else reproach be brought upon the name of Christ and the church, or else others be emboldened to sin, or else the offender himself fail to test his own soul and realize the gravity of his offense.

Excommunication – The procedure followed depends upon the nature of the offense; however, the following procedure shall be followed in most cases. If the process directed in Matthew 18:15-18 does not lead to restoration of fellowship, charges shall be drawn up by the eldership. After a fair and impartial hearing of all the witnesses accessible and all the facts ascertainable, and if the eldership unanimously believes the accused to be guilty, the eldership shall make an appropriate recommendation to the congregation. The congregation shall have the right to excommunicate a member by a simple majority vote of the members present and voting.

Restoration – Restoration brings peace to a conscience troubled by separation from church fellowship. Excommunication will end when in the unanimous opinion of the elders the one under discipline has provided satisfactory evidence of repentance. Full membership of a disciplined or excommunicated member will be reinstated upon a simple majority vote. A confession of repentance, by the offender, will be read to the congregation on the Lord's Day, and the elders shall formally announce the end of the discipline and the restoration of fellowship.

Appendix 1

General categories of sinful behavior which demand church disciplinary action

1. A stubborn private offender

Matthew 18:15-17 *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.¹⁶ But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

A private offense which remains unresolved after the method prescribed in Matthew 18:15,16 may be considered an aggravated offense.

2. Divisive teachings or behavior

Romans 16:17 *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.*

Titus 3:10 *As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,*

The deliberate and persistent propagation of serious doctrinal error contrary to Scripture and our confession, and/or attempts to sow discord among us contrary to Scripture and this constitution.

3. Disorderly behavior

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 *But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?¹³ God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”*

Deliberate conduct which displays a flagrant or public disregard for the order appointed by God for all mankind (natural law), or the order established by Christ for His church in Scripture.

4. Contempt of church discipline: The refusal of an offender to meet with the elders who are lawfully investigating alleged sinful behavior.

Appendix 2

Society and Culture

1. Regarding Human Sexuality

a. Marriage - We believe that the only legitimate marriage is the joining of one man and one woman. (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:10; Eph. 5: 22-23)

b. Sexual Misbehavior - We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman; that any form of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, transgender, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery, and pornography are sinful perversions of God's gift of sex, and that God disapproves of and forbids any attempt to alter one's gender by surgery or appearance. (Gen. 2:24, 19:5, 19:13, 26:8, 9; Lev. 18:1-30; Rom. 1:26-29; 1 Cor. 5:1, 6:9; 1 Thess. 4:1-8; Heb. 13:4)

c. Impenitence in the above sins is inconsistent with membership in STBC and exposes any member to the discipline of the church including ultimately excommunication.

d. Marriage ceremonies performed in any facility owned, leased, or rented by this church will only be those ceremonies that are sanctioned by God as reflected in the above perspectives.

2. Regarding Standards of Conduct

a. Church functions and services are private meetings held on private property and should not be considered open to the general public under all circumstances. The church officers are authorized and reserve the right to remove any participant for any reason.

b. Members/participants may be dismissed/removed from any ministry or function or asked not to return if they demonstrate by conduct or spirit that they are out of harmony with our Statement of Faith or in the spirit of the policies of STBC, whether on or off church property, as determined by the elders.

3. Regarding Abortion

We believe that life begins at conception and that the intentional killing of unborn children is therefore murder and forbidden by God.

4. Regarding Euthanasia and Suicide

We believe that the intentional taking of any innocent human life is murder and forbidden by God.

