

Constitution

Santa Teresa Baptist Church
Santa Teresa, New Mexico

Book 2 - Church Officers

London Baptist Confession of 1689:26:8 A particular church, gathered and completely organized according to the mind of Christ, consists of officers and members; and the officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the church (so called and gathered), for the peculiar administration of ordinances, and execution of power or duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the world, are bishops or elders, and deacons.

SECTION 1 – GENERAL STATEMENT

1. Jesus Christ alone is Head of the church (Col. 1:18). He has ordained that individual churches be governed by himself through office-bearers whom he has endowed by his Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Christ has ordained that local churches be ruled by elders and served by deacons. Besides the offices of elder and deacon the Scriptures acknowledge no other officers which continue in the church today (Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-13).
2. It is the duty of the church to seek from among its male members those that Christ the Lord has bestowed the necessary gifts for office-bearing. After formally recognizing them by congregational vote, the church shall set them apart by united prayer, and then submit to their God-given authority. No less than a three-fourths majority of the members present and voting shall be required for the election of an officer.
3. In the case that the church no longer has qualified officers, the membership may invite another like-minded congregation to oversee the church until such time that qualified officers are raised up.

SECTION 2 – GENERAL PREREQUISITES

1. All officers of this church must be members in good standing of this church.
2. Any individual set apart to one of these offices must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the church's confessions

of faith and constitution. If he should at any time move from this agreement, he is under immediate, spiritual and moral obligation to make that fact known to the elders privately.

3. While we acknowledge the valuable gifts which God has given to women and the wonderful assistance they may render to the officers of the church (Rom. 16:1-6; Phil. 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:11), the Bible prohibits them from holding either the office of deacon or elder (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; I Tim. 2:8-15; 3:1-7). Women, therefore, shall not be nominated, elected, or ordained to either of these offices in the church. It is also contrary to Scripture for any woman to exercise headship or leadership in a formal meeting of the whole church either by leading in prayer, conducting the worship, reading the Scripture, leading the singing, administering the sacraments, or ministering the Word of God (1 Cor. 14:33b-35; 1 Tim. 2:8-15).

SECTION 3 – ELDERS

1. Those who have been called and equipped by God to rule and teach in the church are identified as elders, pastors, or overseers. These three names designate one and the same office in a New Testament Church (Acts 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11-12; Titus 1:5,7).
2. Anyone desiring the office of an elder must show evidence to God's people the personal, domestic and ministerial qualifications set forth in the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9).
3. Because the authority of the elders of the church is human authority exercised in the house of God, it has both high prerogatives and important limitations;
 - a. It is divinely-delegated authority. Thus, elders are answerable to God for the exercise of this authority (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17). They are, therefore, obligated to discharge all the duties specified in the Scriptures in such passages as Acts 20:17-35; 1 Peter 5:1-4; and Heb. 13:17.
 - b. When elders exercise this authority by requiring obedience to their leadership, they must seek to gain the consciences of God's people through the ministry of the Word (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-2; Heb. 13:17).
 - c. The authority of the elders does not include the right to make all decisions unilaterally. The Bible makes clear that decisions having to do with corrective discipline and the recognition of officers require the

consent of the local church (Acts 6:2-6; 9:26; 1 Cor. 5:4-5, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6). It is only fitting that other important matters such as the reception and exclusion of church members, the full support and involuntary removal of officers and major financial decisions be approved by the consent of the church. Nevertheless, the elders must provide definitive leadership to the church in the making of such decisions.

d. The authority of the elders is limited to the sphere of the local church. They may not require consequences for sin beyond those of church discipline, invade the spheres of other ordained human authorities (husbands, fathers, civil rulers and employers), or command God's people regarding matters not specified in Scripture (Matt. 22:21; Luke 12:13-14). They must, however, order the house of God by the application of His Word (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:3a; Rom. 13:1-7; Eph. 5:22-6:9; 1 Cor. 7:25-28; 35-40).

e. The authority of elders is conditioned by the fact that they are themselves members of the local church. While elders are shepherds over the flock, they are also members of the flock. Therefore, each individual elder is entitled to the same privileges, is obligated by the same responsibilities and is subject to the same discipline as are all other members of the church. Thus, each individual elder is both under the oversight of his fellow elders and accountable to the church as a whole (Matt. 18:17; 23:9; 26:31; Gal. 2:11; 3 John 1, 9-10).

f. The authority of every elder (overseer or pastor) is the same. Thus, every elder has equal rule in the church. Though gifts possessed and functions performed will vary from elder to elder, this diversity must never undermine real parity among the elders (Acts 20:28; Gal. 2:11; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 5:17).

g. Finally, the authority of the elders is a very real authority. When it is biblically exercised, God's people are required to submit to this authority (Heb. 13:17).

4. One crucial aspect of the duties of elders is overseeing the flock of God. Elders shall, when possible, visit with each member of the church and be available to them for advice, encouragement, comfort, exhortation and teaching. As part of the oversight function, they shall meet together frequently for prayer, discussions and thought about matters relating to the church; and provide mutual assistance to one another (Acts 15:6).

5. Another crucial aspect of the duties of elders is exercising leadership with regard to the meetings and worship of the church. The elders shall appoint such meetings as they believe good for the spiritual health of the church and assure that they are conducted to the glory of God and according to the provisions regulated by His Word.
6. While the New Testament clearly indicates that there may be elders who are not financially supported by the church, the elders who rule well, and especially those who labor in the Word and doctrine, will, when possible, be maintained in material necessities and disentangled from the cares of another vocation according to their gifts, the needs and capability of the church and the direction of Christ her Head (1 Tim. 5:17ff).
7. Though a plurality of elders is the New Testament norm for every church, the New Testament does not specify the number of elders each church should have, nor does it dictate the length of an elder's term of office. If, however, an elder fails to maintain the necessary scriptural qualifications, he may be removed from his office by the church.
8. This constitution assumes, and the norms of biblical church order ordinarily require, that a plurality of elders oversee the local church. While each local church is independent, not every local church is fully organized. The lack of a plurality of elders is a real, serious, and practical deficiency in the order of a gospel church (Tit. 1:5).

SECTION 4 – DEACONS

1. Deacons are primarily responsible for assisting the elders in those practical aspects of ministry which would otherwise distract them from their priorities of the ministry of the Word, prayer and shepherding. Such practical matters include the administration of benevolence, the maintenance and improvement of the church's facilities, the management of various business affairs and the facilitation of ministries within the church.
2. Deacons must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with, and in subjection to, the elders. Deacons shall meet regularly with the elders in order to facilitate communication between them and to facilitate the efficient functioning of the diaconate.
3. The number of deacons shall not be fixed. The church shall set apart according to its need men who show evidence of the scriptural

qualifications for that office (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

4. No term of office shall be fixed for deacons. If a deacon fails to meet the necessary scriptural qualifications for his office, he may be removed from office by the church.

SECTION 5: APPOINTMENT OF OFFICERS

1. **GENERAL STATEMENT:** The appointment of officers is the prerogative of Christ alone. However, he has ordained that they be formally recognized by the consent of the local church they serve. Elders and deacons are ordained to office by the laying on of hands by the eldership (1 Tim. 4:14). This is an expression of approval for which the elders are responsible (1 Tim. 5:22). Therefore, each officer must have the approval, not only of the church as a whole, but of the eldership. The Lord's appointment of an individual to an office is recognized by that individual's possession of those graces and gifts required by Scripture for that office, and his own conviction that the Lord is calling him to minister in that office. The recognition of officers is a matter of such importance that it should never proceed without much prayerful waiting upon God, careful consideration of the relevant passages of Scripture and a thorough evaluation of the persons being considered. Each member of the church has a responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding these matters.
2. **PROCEDURE OF APPOINTMENT:** The recognition of those whom the Lord has appointed to bear office in this church is carried out in three steps: nomination, election, and ordination.
 - a. **Nomination**
 - (1) **Congregational Input:** The members of the church are encouraged to express to the elders (privately) their views concerning those whom Christ may be gifting for office in the church. The elders will seriously consider the wisdom God gives to His church. At the discretion of the elders, a nominations ballot may be held on which the members of the church indicate those they believe the Lord is equipping for office in the church. The results of this ballot shall be secret—known only to the elders and those they deem it appropriate to also know the results. Nevertheless, since it is the elder's responsibility to lead the church, nominations to office are to be made by the eldership.

(2) The Pulpit Committee: If at any time the church is without a pastor, a pulpit committee shall be elected by the church at any regular or specially called business meeting. The committee shall seek out a scripturally qualified man, and then nominate him to the church. The church shall then prayerfully consider him for the office of overseer. When possible, the church should look within its own membership to see if Christ is actually equipping someone for the office from within the church.

b. Election

Any church meeting for the election of officers shall be announced on two Lord's Days prior to its being held. The names of all nominees shall be separately discussed and voted upon. During the discussion the nominee under consideration and members of his immediate family (his wife and minor children) shall leave the meeting until a written ballot is taken. The Scriptural qualifications shall be read and expounded, and the nominee's qualifications openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the nominee. The church should seek unanimity concerning each nominee, but where unanimity is not realized, three-fourths of those ballots cast shall be required for election.

c. Ordination

Following the election of an officer there shall be a portion of a worship service set aside at which time the officer-elect shall be ordained and installed into office by the promising of vows and the laying on of the hands of the eldership. The laying on of the elders' hands shall signify their approval of an officer-elect. This solemn act should always be accompanied by the special prayers of the church (Acts 13:1-3).

(1) Promising of vows: One of the elders shall question newly elected officer as follows:

Vow 1 - Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, and do you accept them as the only authoritative, sufficient and infallible rule of faith and practice?

Vow 2 – Do you sincerely receive, adopt and defend the Confession, Constitution, and By-Laws of this church?

Vow 3 – Do you promise to promote the peace, unity and purity of this church?

Vow 4 (for elders) - Do you accept the Office of Elder readily, and do you promise to perform its duties of training, equipping, caring for, and protecting the flock of God in the fear of God?

Vow 4 (for deacons) - Do you accept the Office of Deacon and do you promise to care for the poor and needy, to attend to the business affairs of this church, and to assist the elders as they have need in the fear of God?

(2) Laying on of hands: Following the promising of vows the hands of the existing eldership shall be placed on the heads of the new officers and prayer offered in their behalf. Following this, the people shall be exhorted to esteem and obey those whom God has placed over them.

SECTION 6: REVIEW OF OFFICERS:

1. Officers should hold office as long as in the esteem of the church they meet the biblical qualifications for their office.
2. A meeting to review the qualifications of an officer may be called by a majority of the elders, or a majority of the other elders in the case of an elder. Members of the church may also request such a meeting. This request must be made in writing, must state the name of the officer requested to be reviewed, must avoid slander, must be accompanied by the signatures of one-fourth of the total voting membership of the church, and must be presented to the elders, who shall in a timely and constitutional way call such a meeting.
3. Any meeting for the review of an officer shall be announced on four consecutive Lord's Days prior to its being held. The scriptural qualifications must form the basis of the discussion and decision of the church. The officer's qualifications must be openly discussed in the fear of God and with due respect for the reputation of the officer. The officer under discussion must be permitted to defend himself. The church should seek unanimity of mind concerning the matter, but if such unanimity is not realized, a simple majority of those ballots cast shall be required for the confirmation of an officer in his office. Any officer failing confirmation will be immediately removed from his office.
4. An officer may resign his office without prejudice if he does so in an orderly fashion. This resignation shall be submitted in writing to the elders of the church and in a timely fashion announced to the church.

