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ARTICLE I

Name & Location of Offices

The name of this Corporation is Cow Creek Community Church. It is a California nonprofit religious Corporation with its principal offices in Palo Cedro, California.

ARTICLE II

Foundation, Purpose & Priorities of the Church

Foundation: The foundation of this Church is the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11), and its code of guidance in all its affairs is the Word of God. This Church does here affirm its faith that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are the Word of Almighty God (Luke 24:27; 2 Peter 3:15-16; 2 Timothy 3:16).

Purpose: The purpose of Cow Creek Community Church (Cow Creek) can be summarized in the statement of purpose that Jesus Himself gave to His disciples: “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Priorities: The priorities of Cow Creek can be summarized as follows from Acts 2:42-47:

First - Cow Creek’s chief objective is to worship and glorify God. We seek to propagate and practice conformance to God’s will and delight in Him as the main priority for everything we do. It is our chief aim to reflect back to God (through our words, attitudes and actions) the great treasure that He is in our lives.

Second - to teach and preach all the counsel of God’s Word, and, through the wisdom found in His Word, be guided in our understanding of the Person of God, the way of salvation, and all other areas of godly living, both within and outside of the church.

Third - to experience true fellowship as the family of God through loving and caring relationships; that our relationships would be guided by the truth of God’s Word, and that, being rooted and grounded in love, we would be built up in the likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourth - to be a body of believers in which every member is actively putting to use the spiritual gifting God has given them through His Spirit, laboring for the building up (edification) of the church in love.

Fifth - to spread a passion and delight for the supremacy of God through the Lord Jesus Christ to all the peoples of the world – locally, nationally and internationally. Our great desire is to be a “mission minded/mission guided” body of believers who are exhilarated with God.

****** Finally, in all five of the above priorities, it is our aim to pursue God’s strength and supply through trusting reliant prayer, that in all things, God would receive the glory!

ARTICLE III Affirmation of Faith

(What we teach at Cow Creek Community Church)

Preface: Why such a lengthy, detailed affirmation as this? First, our aim is not to discover how little can be believed, but rather to embrace and teach “the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Our aim is to encourage a hearty adherence to the Bible, the fullness of its truth, and the glory of its Author. Second, we believe that the cause of unity in the church is best served, not by finding the lowest common denominator of doctrine, around which all can gather, but by elevating the value of truth, stating the doctrinal parameters of the church, seeking the unity that comes from the truth, and then demonstrating to the world how Christians can love each other across boundaries rather than by removing boundaries.

This Affirmation of Faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself (the Scriptures), as the inspired Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. For the purposes of the faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline of Cow Creek Community Church, our elder board is Cow Creek’s final interpretive authority on the Bible’s meaning and application.

We do not claim infallibility for this affirmation and are open to refinement and correction from Scripture. Yet, we do hold firmly to these truths as we see them and call on others to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so (Acts 17:11). As we think about and discuss this affirmation together, it may be that we will learn from each other, and the boundaries will be adjusted, even possibly folding formerly disagreeing groups into closer fellowship.

Finally, we do not believe that all things in this affirmation of faith are of equal weight, some being more essential, some less. We do not believe; therefore, that every part of this affirmation must be believed in order for one to be saved.

The Scriptures: We teach that the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are the revelation (Word) of God. Thus, every word of the original autographs (documents) was inspired by God and without error. Consequently, the whole of Scripture is authoritative for the faith of every believer and sufficient (via the teaching and illumination of the Holy Spirit) for addressing every need (spiritual, psychological, emotional, interpersonal, etc.) within the lives of God’s people. (2 Timothy 3:16,17; 2 Peter 1:20,21; Mark 13:31; John 8:31,32; Acts 20:32)

We teach that, whereas there may be several applications of any given passage of Scripture, there is but one true interpretation. The meaning of Scripture is to be found as one diligently applies the literal grammatical-historical method of interpretation under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit (John 16:12-15; 1 Corinthians 2:7-15; 1 John 2:20). It is the responsibility of believers to ascertain carefully the true intent and meaning of Scripture, recognizing that proper application is binding on all generations.

The God of the Word (the Trinity): We teach that there is one living and true God Who is infinite, spiritual, eternally self-existent, unchangeable in His nature, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, righteous, good, truth and love. God exists eternally as three distinct, yet inseparable persons known as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three are one (indivisible) as to their nature, essence and attributes. While these three are equal in every divine perfection, they execute distinct yet harmonious functions in the work of creation (by divine fiat, not evolutionary process), providence and redemption. (Genesis 1:1,26;

Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 45:5-7; John 1:1,3; 4:24; Matthew 28:19; Romans 1:19-20; 2 Corinthians 13:14)

God the Father: We teach that God the Father, the first Person of the Trinity, orders and disposes all things according to His own purpose and grace (Psalm 145:8-9; 1 Corinthians 8:6). He is the Creator of all things (Genesis 1:1-31; Ephesians 3:9). As the only absolute and omnipotent Ruler in the universe, He is sovereign in creation, providence, and redemption (Psalm 103:19; Romans 11:36). His fatherhood involves both His designation within the Trinity and His relationship with mankind. As Creator He is Father to all men (Acts 17:24-28), but He is spiritual Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:18). He continually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and events (1 Chronicles 29:11). In His sovereignty He is neither the author nor approver of sin (Habakkuk 1:13; James 1:13-17), nor does He abridge the accountability of moral, intelligent creatures (Romans 2:2-11; 1 Peter 1:17). He has graciously chosen from eternity past those whom He would have as His own (Ephesians 1:4-6); He saves from sin all who come to Him through Jesus Christ; He adopts as His own all those who come to Him; and He becomes, upon adoption, Father to His own (John 1:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:5).

Jesus Christ: We teach that Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity, possesses all the divine excellencies, and in these He is coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal with the Father (John 10:30, 14:9). His attributes of greatness and goodness also correspond to the Father's. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, God the Father created the universe, and all things continue to exist and hold together by Christ's power (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16-17). Christ's emptying of Himself in Philippians 2:5-8 was not of His divine essence or the surrendering of His full Deity but pertained to the independent exercise of His Divine prerogatives during the First Advent - the incarnation (John 1:14). His incarnation was initiated by the Virgin Birth or Miraculous Conception in which He took upon Himself genuine humanity (Hebrews 2:9-18). He thereby became the unique God-man who consequently is the perfect Revealer, Savior, Mediator, and ultimately the Judge of all men (John 1:18; Titus 2:13; 1 Timothy 2:5; John 5:27). Through this loving condescension, He fully accomplished His task of grace which culminated in His sacrificial death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, furnishing the grounds for the forgiveness of believing sinners (Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Romans 6:1-11; Romans 1:4, 4:25; Acts 1:9). As our sole and perfect Mediator, Christ is prophet, priest, and king of the Church of God (1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 7:24; Daniel 7:14; Acts 4:12; Luke 1:33; John 14:6).

We teach that our Lord Jesus Christ fulfilled His priestly office by offering Himself a sacrifice for sin (Hebrews 5:7-9, 7:27) truly (i.e., actually, not potentially) accomplishing our redemption and reconciliation (Luke 1:68; Revelation 5:9) through the shedding of His blood and sacrificial death on the cross. His death was voluntary, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, and redemptive (John 10:15; Romans 3:24-25, 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24). As a result of these truths, we teach that Christ's atoning death is sufficient to satisfy God's eternal justice for the sins of all mankind but is efficient only for all who will believe - who constitute the elect people of God (Isaiah 53:8; Matthew 1:21, 20:28; Luke 1:68; John 10:15; Ephesians 5:25).

Today our Lord is building His Church (Matthew 16:18) and continually ministers to her as the heavenly Advocate interceding for the saints (Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1). He will return for His bride in glory (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and will adjudicate the reward and retribution of all people (Acts 17:30-31; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15).

The Holy Spirit: We teach that the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Godhead, is equal in nature with God the Father and God the Son (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, 18; 2 Corinthians 13:14). His divine Personhood is attested by many references to His attributes

of greatness and goodness. In His role within the economy of the Trinity, He bears divine witness to the Person and work of Christ in this age (John 15:26). In His relationship to the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit is their divine Author and Applier (2 Samuel 23:2; John 14:25-26, 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16; Ephesians 6:17; 2 Peter 1:21).

He is the predominant divine Agent in the Father's plan of salvation through the work of the Son (John 3:1-10; 16:8-11). The Holy Spirit has always been sovereignly active in regeneration and renewal, i.e., in personal salvation and sanctification in both the Old and New Testament eras. He is vitally associated with our adoption, sealing and service (Romans 8:12-17; Ephesians 1:13, 5:18). Historically, the Holy Spirit was intimately involved in the Church's birth at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). In this present age, all genuine disciples permanently possess the full indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit from the moment of salvation as a spiritual grace of the New Covenant (John 16:13; Romans 8:9; Ephesians 1:13-14). It is the duty of all those born of the Spirit to be controlled by the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). The Holy Spirit also sanctifies, fills, instructs, empowers them for service, and seals them unto the day of redemption (Acts 4:31; Romans 8:9; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Ephesians 1:13; 1 John 2:20, 27).

We teach that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the Church. He glorifies neither Himself nor His gifts by ostentatious displays, but He does glorify Christ by implementing His work of redeeming the lost and building up believers in the most holy faith (John 16:13-14; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 3:18). In this respect, God the Holy Spirit is sovereign in the bestowing of all His gifts for the purpose of mutual edification and the perfecting of the saints (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Romans 12:6-9).

Man & Sin: We teach that God created mankind in and according to His own image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27), and even after the fall, no matter how thoroughly distorted that image has become, it is not eradicated (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9).

Both male and female equally bear the image of God. Although they share the same essence of being, there are nevertheless functional distinctions and subordinations. These differences, biblically based upon creation and not cultural biases, are significant for both our families and our congregation (1 Corinthians 11:1-16; Ephesians 5:22-33; 1 Timothy 2:8-15; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6).

We teach that through Adam's one act of disobedience, he not only fell from his estate of innocence into one of separation and alienation from God, but as our representative, he also plunged the whole race into sin and death (Genesis 2:17, 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-21). Consequently, all persons from their conception and birth are spiritually estranged from God, innately unholy and stand condemned by their sinful nature and their sinful acts before their Creator and Judge (Psalm 51:5; Romans 1:18-3:20; Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:21).

We teach that man's depravity (i.e., corrupted sinful nature) is total in breadth (1 Kings 8:46; Psalm 14:1-3; Isaiah 1:2-6, 53:6; Romans 3:9-20) and depth (Ecclesiastes 9:3; Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:14-23). Sin, like a drop of poison deposited in a cup of water, has poisoned the entire cup. Similarly, all the faculties of fallen man's heart (i.e., rational, volitional, emotional, etc.) are morally tainted by sin and perversity (Genesis 6:5; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Ephesians 4:17-19). Thus, fallen man is blind and helpless, utterly incapable of choosing or doing what is spiritually acceptable to God apart from divine grace. Man is wholly incapable of spiritual self reformation or rescue and is wholly in need of God's salvation (Isaiah 64:5-7; Jeremiah 13:23; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 1:21-22).

Salvation: We teach that the salvation of sinful men has always ultimately depended upon the sovereign grace of God. A single divine method of salvation by grace through faith has been in effect since the fall of man (Romans 4:1-9, 9:16; Ephesians 2:8-9).

God's sovereign plan of salvation was divinely drafted in eternity past (Ephesians 1:4), including all of its provisions (the work of Christ and the Spirit) and processes (Titus 3:3-7). Furthermore, on an individual, historical basis, His grace stands behind all the stages of salvation, i.e., past - justification; present - sanctification; and future - glorification (Romans 8:29-30). Thus, our salvation is entirely accomplished by the almighty power of the sovereign and gracious triune God. "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy" (Titus 3:5). Some vital elements of His salvation plan include:

Election & human responsibility: We teach that election is the gracious act of God by which, before the foundation of the world, He chose in Christ those whom He graciously calls, regenerates, justifies, sanctifies, and glorifies (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 2:10; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

We teach that sovereign election does not contradict or negate the free offer of the blessings of the gospel to all people, the responsibility of man to repent and trust Christ as Savior and Lord, or the responsibility of believers to communicate the gospel to the lost (Ezekiel 18:23, 32, 33:11; John 3:18-19, 36, 5:40; Romans 10:8-15; 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; Revelation 22:17). Nevertheless, since sovereign grace includes the means of receiving the gift of salvation (i.e., repentance and faith), sovereign election will result in what God determines (Acts 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:24-25; Philippians 1:29; 2 Peter 1:1; Ephesians 2:8). All whom the Father calls to Himself will come in faith, and all who come in faith the Father will receive (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

While we teach that the unmerited favor God grants to totally depraved sinners is unconditional (i.e., not related to any initiative of their own part nor to God's anticipation of what they might do by their own will, but freely bestowed by God according to His own purposes, Romans 9:10-16; Titus 3:4-7), we also teach that Scripture affirms human responsibility. We must accept both sides of the truth, though we may not understand how they correspond to one another. People are responsible for what they do with the gospel – or with whatever light they have (Romans 2:11-16), so that punishment is just if they reject the light. And those who reject do so voluntarily out of their own evil free choice. Jesus lamented, "You are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life" (John 5:40). He told unbelievers, "Unless you believe that I am [God], you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). In John 6, our Lord combined both divine sovereignty and human responsibility when He said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (v. 37); "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life" (v. 40); "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him" (v. 44); "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life" (v. 47); and, "No one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father" (v. 65). How both of these two realities can be true simultaneously cannot be understood by the human mind – only by God.

Above all, one must not conclude that God is unjust because He chooses to bestow grace on some but not to everyone. God is never to be measured by what seems fair to human judgment (Romans 9:14-15, 19-24). In Psalm 50:21 God says, "You thought that I was just like you." But God is not like man, nor can He be held to human standards. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Regeneration: We teach that regeneration (i.e., the new birth) is a gracious supernatural work of the Holy Spirit by which the divine nature and divine life are given (John 3:3-7; Titus 3:5). It is instantaneous and is accomplished solely by the power of the Holy Spirit through the instrumentality of the Word of God (John 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). The new birth results in the believer's union with Christ (Colossians 2:13) in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-11), thus receiving the spiritual graces of the New Covenant (i.e., reconciliation, peace with God, a new heart, new affections, and deliverance from the dominating power of sin etc.) (Deuteronomy 30:6; Ezekiel 11:19-20; Romans 2:28-29, 5:1, 6:5-7, 11, 14; Colossians 2:11-12).

Because genuine regeneration involves the imparting of a new life, a new heart and saving faith, it will be manifested by fruits worthy of repentance as demonstrated in righteous attitudes and conduct (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 5:17-21; Philippians 2:12; Galatians 5:6; Colossians 3:16; 2 Peter 1:4-10). This grace-empowered obedience causes the believer to be increasingly conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). Such conformity is climaxed in the believer's glorification when he/she is with Christ thru death or at His return (Romans 8:17; 2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:2-3).

Justification: We teach that justification before God is a gracious act of God (Romans 8:33) by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins (Luke 18:9-14; Acts 2:38, 3:19, 11:18; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 7:10; Isaiah 55:6-7) and confess Him as sovereign Lord (Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Philippians 2:11). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or work of man (Romans 3:20-21, 4:6-8) and involves the placing of our sins on Christ (Colossians 2:14; 1 Peter 2:24) and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us (1 Corinthians 1:2, 30, 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21). By this means God is "just, and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Sanctification: We teach that every believer is sanctified (set apart) unto God by justification and is therefore declared to be holy and identified as a saint. This sanctification is positional, permanent, and instantaneous and should not be confused with progressive sanctification. This sanctification has to do with the believer's standing, not his present walk or experiential condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30, 6:11; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 2:11, 10:10, 14, 13:12; 1 Peter 1:2).

We teach that there is also, by the work of the Holy Spirit, a progressive sanctification by which the state (i.e., practice) of the believer is brought closer to the standing he positionally enjoys through justification. This sanctification is an effect of the love of God manifested in the soul, whereby through the gracious empowering of the Holy Spirit, the believer is enabled to live a life of increasing holiness in conformity to the will of God, becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus Christ (John 17:17, 19; Romans 6:1-22; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4, 5:23). In this respect, we teach that every saved person is involved in a daily conflict. He is a new creation in Christ doing battle against the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:17; Romans 7:15-25), but adequate provision is made for victory through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The struggle nevertheless stays with the believer all through this earthly life and is never completely ended this side of heaven. Eradication of sin is not possible, but the Holy Spirit does provide for victory over sin (Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; Philippians 3:12; Colossians 3:9-10; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9).

Perseverance: We teach the biblical doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints. This doctrine has two parts: (1) God will so work with His people in His grace that they will inevitably be preserved to the end and be saved (1 Peter 1:5; Jude 1:24; John 10:28-30; Philippians 1:6). Thus no true child of God, born of the Holy Spirit, will ever be lost (Romans 8:29-30). (2) At the same time, it is equally true that no person will be saved

without persevering to the end. In order to be saved, believers must persevere to the end in faith and obedience (Mark 13:13; Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:14, 12:14). The means God uses to bring about our perseverance are His magnificent promises (2 Peter 1:3-4) and His terrifying warnings (Hebrews 10:26-27).

The Church: We teach that the Church is a spiritual body of people comprised of those who have received life from Jesus Christ. All who place their faith in Jesus Christ are immediately placed into this one united spiritual body by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). The Church exists both universally (i.e., the total number of genuine believers throughout history, Matthew 16:18; 1 Corinthians 12:13) and locally (i.e., localized assemblies, Matthew 18:15-18; Acts 14:23; 20:17; Galatians 1:2).

Although salvation is bestowed and appropriated individually, the scriptural focus is always upon the corporate Body (local church) within which the individual is to be a complementary, contributing member (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-27). Christ establishes and oversees this unity and diversity in order that the local church might become the main context for worship and service, and a springboard for evangelism (Ephesians 4:1-16). The primary overarching purpose of the Church, whether viewed from the local perspective or the universal, is to glorify God (Ephesians 1:3-14, 3:21; 1 Peter 4:11).

The Scriptures establish two offices within the local church: Elders and Deacons (See Article VII). Those who serve in these capacities must be biblically qualified (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5). The Elders/Pastors are especially accountable for the spiritual welfare of their Master's congregation. He will judge not only them and their guidance of His sheep but also the congregation's expected submission to their spiritual direction (Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 13:7, 17). Deacons, on the other hand, are official servants within the church, helping the Elders to care for the many needs within the church body (Acts 6:1-6).

Within the context of its assembled fellowship (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 14:23, 28-35; Hebrews 10:24-25), the primary ordinances of believers' baptism and the Lord's Supper (i.e., Communion, breaking of bread) are to be perpetuated (Matthew 26:26-29; 28:16-20; Romans 6:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42). The Lord's Supper calls our attention to the atonement of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:28-32). This worship service is one in which we look back to the finished work of Christ and also forward to the consummation of our redemption (Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:23-30). We also teach that, whereas the elements of communion are only representative of the flesh and blood of Christ, the Lord's Supper is nevertheless an actual Communion with the risen Christ who is present in a unique way, fellowshiping with His people (1 Corinthians 10:16).

Each local church is independent or autonomous in status, although there should be occasions of interdependence among local assemblies of the same mindset and loyalty to the Lord and His Word (Acts 15:19-31; Romans 15:26-27).

Marriage and The Family: We teach that God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. We define marriage as the exclusive covenantal union of one man to one woman (as those men and women have been biologically assigned at birth) in covenant commitment for a lifetime. A civil government's sanction of a union will be recognized as legitimate marriage by Cow Creek Community Church only to the extent that it is consistent with the definition of marriage found in this Affirmation of Faith. Marriage is

God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church. The marriage relationship is to model the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, protect, and lead his family. A wife is to respect and graciously follow the servant leadership of her husband as the church does so toward Christ. The wife is to serve as her husband's helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation. Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents. (Genesis 2:18-25; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalms 78:1-8; 127; 128; 139:13-16; Proverbs 1:8; 5:15-20; 6:20-22; 13:24; 14:1; 22:6,15; 31:10-31; Malachi 2:14-16; Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 7:1-16; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4; 1 Timothy 5:8,14; Titus 2:3-5; Hebrews 13:4; 1 Peter 3:1-7).

Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality: As stated above, we believe that marriage is the exclusive covenantal union of one man to one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe that heterosexuality is God's revealed will for mankind and that a chaste and faithful expression of this (whether in singleness or in marriage) is the ideal standard to which God calls all people.

We believe that God has commanded in the Bible that no sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage. Hence, the church teaches that any sexual activity outside of marriage, including but not limited to, adultery, premarital sex, lust, homosexuality, and pedophilia, are sins against God. Furthermore, the creation, distribution, and viewing of pornography are also taught as being sin, both in the Bible and in the church.

We believe that the Bible teaches that mankind, as male and female, are each made in the image and likeness of God, and therefore rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person. Therefore, we teach that transgender behavior and/or desires are sin.

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Cow Creek Community Church as the local Body of Christ, and to provide a biblical role model to the Cow Creek members and the community, it is imperative that all persons employed by Cow Creek in any capacity, or who serve as volunteers, agree to abide by this statement on Marriage, Gender and Sexuality.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. We believe that there is hope for the person with sexuality or gender issues. We believe Jesus Christ offers a healing alternative in which the power of sin is broken and the person is freed to know and experience his or her true identity in Christ and in the fellowship of his or her local Church.

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with Scripture nor the teaching of Cow Creek Community Church.

The Last Things: We teach the personal and visible return of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth, the establishment of His kingdom, and the eternal rule of God. We teach the resurrection of the body, the final judgment, the eternal joy of the righteous and the endless suffering of the wicked. (Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; Acts 1:11; John 14:3; 1 Corinthians 15:24-28; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Revelation 19:11-16; 20:11-21:4)

WHAT IT MEANS TO BECOME AND BE A CHRISTIAN: Being a Christian is more than identifying yourself with a particular religion or affirming a certain value system. Becoming and being a Christian means you have embraced what the Bible says about God, mankind, and salvation. Consider the following truths found in Scripture:

God Is Sovereign Creator. Contemporary thinking says man is the product of evolution. But the Bible says we were created by a personal God to love, serve, and enjoy endless fellowship with Him. The New Testament reveals it was Jesus Himself who created everything (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16). Therefore, He also owns and rules everything (Psalm 103:19). That means He has authority over our lives and we owe Him absolute allegiance, obedience, and worship.

God Is Holy. God is absolutely and perfectly holy (Isaiah 6:3), therefore He cannot commit or approve of evil (James 1:13). God requires holiness of us as well. 1 Peter 1:16 says, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Mankind Is Sinful. According to Scripture, everyone is guilty of sin: “There is no man who does not sin” (1 Kings 8:46). That doesn’t mean we’re incapable of performing acts of human kindness. But we’re utterly incapable of understanding, loving, or pleasing God on our own. (Romans 3:10-12)

Sin Demands a Penalty. God’s holiness and justice demand that all sin be punished by death (Ezekiel 18:4). That’s why simply changing our patterns of behavior can’t solve our sin problem or eliminate its consequences.

Jesus Is Lord and Savior. As already said, the New Testament reveals it was Jesus Himself who created everything and that He owns and rules everything. This Almighty Lord also came, became a man, lived the perfect life, gave Himself willingly to suffer and be crucified as a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners, was buried, and rose victoriously from the dead. Yes, God’s justice demands death for sin, and in His love God provided a Savior who paid the penalty and died for sinners (1 Peter 3:18). “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16). Christ’s death satisfied the demands of God’s justice and Christ’s perfect life satisfied the demands of God’s holiness (2 Corinthians 5:21), thereby enabling Him to forgive and save sinners. *How does a person receive this priceless gift from God?* Romans 10:9 tells us, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”

The Character of Saving Faith. True faith (belief) is always accompanied by repentance from sin. Repentance is agreeing with God that you are sinful, confessing your sins to Him, and making a conscious choice to turn from sin (Luke 13:3,5; 1 Thessalonians 1:9) and pursue Christ (Matthew 11:28-30; John 17:3) and obedience to Him (1 John 2:3). It isn’t enough to believe certain facts about Christ with no heartfelt love for Him and desire to follow. Even Satan and his demons believe in the true God (James 2:19), but they don’t love and obey Him. True saving faith always responds in obedience (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, God commands you and we implore you to turn from your sins and trust entirely in Christ. “For the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed’” (Romans 10:11).

** If you have questions about how you can become a Christian, or want help in knowing how to live the Christian life, please contact us at Cow Creek Community Church (530) 547-5483; www.cowcreekchurch.com.

ARTICLE IV Church Membership

Purpose of Membership: Why become an official member of Cow Creek? First, formal membership at Cow Creek is not required to attend worship services, enjoy home fellowship groups, or to serve at Cow Creek in many different ministry capacities. Also, let us acknowledge that membership does not make a believer a different kind of Christian. It does not infuse greater qualifications for ministry, make a believer more spiritual, or in any way add to what Jesus Christ has already accomplished. Nevertheless, the Elders of Cow Creek have determined that a formal process of membership does assist in establishing a number of important things:

First, the formal commitment of membership encourages the believer through their covenant to care for and serve the local church, and it signifies their affirmation to submit to the leadership and oversight of the eldership of Cow Creek. Second, it establishes accountability between members for the mutual edification, growth and love of one another. And third, each applicant for membership is asked to review our Constitution and Bylaws, and to provide a Christian testimony of their salvation. As such, the membership process provides the Elders of Cow Creek with the opportunity to ascertain some measure of each applicant's beliefs, personal history and their essential understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, membership provides our leadership with an excellent opportunity to responsibly pastor the people whom the Lord brings to us.

We hope this provides some measure of explanation and encouragement regarding membership. Our goal is not to arbitrarily restrict or frustrate the ministry and giftedness of believers, but rather to provide reasonable pastoral oversight to maximize the care, growth, maturity and protection of the saints.

Applications for Membership: All requests for membership shall be made to an Elder (Pastor). Upon making such a request, the person shall be given an application for membership, along with a copy of the Constitution & Bylaws of Cow Creek.

Baptism and Church Membership: The teaching and practice of baptism at Cow Creek Community Church is defined in the Affirmation of Faith. The key paragraph states: "Within the context of its assembled fellowship..., the primary ordinances of believers baptism and the Lord's Supper...are to be perpetuated. Christian baptism by immersion (Acts 8:36-39) is the solemn and beautiful testimony of a believer showing forth his faith in the crucified, buried, and risen Savior, and his union with Him in death to sin and resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:1-11). It is also a sign of fellowship and identification with the visible body of Christ (Acts 2:41-42)."

Thus the official position of Cow Creek Community Church is that only baptism by immersion of believers will be taught and practiced by the church. Customarily, therefore, all members of the church will have been baptized by immersion as believers.

However, we believe it is fitting that membership in the local church should have prerequisites similar to the prerequisites for membership in the universal church. In other words, we believe it is unfitting to deny membership to a person who, by faith in Christ,

gives evidence of regeneration. Therefore, our aim is not to elevate beliefs and practices that are non-essential to the level of prerequisites for church membership. This implies that Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but, as they believe, by some other method or before they believed, may under some circumstances be members of this church.

Thus, we will welcome into membership candidates who, after a time of study, discussion, and prayer, prescribed by the Elders, retain a conviction that it would be a violation of their conscience to be baptized by immersion as believers. This conviction of conscience must be based on a plausible, intelligible, Scripturally-based argument rather than on mere adherence to a tradition or family expectations. The elders will make all such judgments in presenting candidates for membership to the congregation. All candidates for membership, even when holding firmly to views different from the official position of the elders, must demonstrate a humble and teachable disposition with respect to this issue.

We will not admit into membership persons who refuse to practice any form of baptismal ritual, or who believe that their water baptism caused their regeneration. The former is a serious rejection of the Lord's commandment, and the latter is a serious misunderstanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Holy Spirit's work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or any outward ritual.

Becoming a Member: Membership in Cow Creek will be open to anyone¹ who: (1) professes personal faith in Jesus Christ for his/her eternal salvation; (2) signifies this profession by water baptism; (3) completes an application for church membership (see above); (4) reviews the Constitution and Bylaws of Cow Creek; and finally, (5) has a personal interview with an Elder of Cow Creek². Upon unanimous approval of the Elder Board, a new member shall testify publicly his/her commitment to Cow Creek before a regularly held congregational meeting.

¹Anyone who is baptized by the church will be considered a member of the church, however younger children who are baptized will have what we might call a 'youth membership'. This means that their privileges in church life will be somewhat restricted until they are 18 years of age. For instance, children will be able to take the Lord's Supper and enjoy the means of grace in the context of body life like any other member. However, they will not give input on issues that require the consensus approval of the church. Please see our 'Guidelines For Baptism And Children' document for more specific information regarding our policy for the baptism of children.

²As stated above, the purpose of interviewing with an Elder is to gather some measure of each applicant's beliefs, personal history, and their essential understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We understand that some believers may disagree with certain parts of our Affirmation of Faith. It is the responsibility of the Elders to (1) determine the significance of the disagreement, (2) the attitude in which it is held, and (3) the potential effect on the welfare of the individual and the fellowship. The Elders will then do one of the following: (1) recommend for membership (2) establish a consultation period to clarify the issue and dialogue with the applicant before a decision is made, or (3) not recommend for membership because of significant doctrinal disagreement.

Again our goal is not to restrict or frustrate ministry or the giftedness of believers, but to provide responsible pastoral oversight for the care, growth, maturity and protection of the saints.

Termination of Membership: Removal from membership may occur either by (1) death; (2) withdrawal at the request of the member¹; (3) absenteeism²; or, (4) church discipline (see Article VI).

¹Members may be removed from membership at their own request by informing the Board of Elders of their intention to withdraw and the reasons therefore. If a member requests to withdraw because of specific problems or disappointments with the church, the Board of Elders shall attempt to resolve those matters so that the member may remain in the church and enjoy greater fruitfulness and personal spiritual growth. However, if the Board of Elders is unable to resolve those matters, it can offer to assist the member in locating a church of like faith and practice that can respond more effectively to his/her gifts and needs.

²Those members who have been absent from the services of the church for 3-6 months will, at the discretion of the Elder Board, be dropped from membership after reasonable attempt has been made by the Elders to make contact, ascertain the reasons for the absence, and effect restoration.

Inactive Status: A member may be placed on inactive membership status to avoid removal if he/she is a member in good standing and makes a written or personal request to the Elders. Inactive status is applicable to those who will be absent for a limited period of time for the purpose of schooling, missionary work, military service or any other reason acceptable to the Elders. A returning, inactive member may be reinstated to active membership by approval of the Elders.

ARTICLE V

Counseling, Confidentiality & Conflict Resolution

Biblical Counseling: All Christians struggle with sin and the effect it has on our lives and our relationships (Romans 3:23; 7:7-25). Whenever a Christian is unable to overcome sinful attitudes or behaviors through private efforts, God commands that he should seek assistance from other members, and especially from the Elders, who have the responsibility of providing pastoral counseling and oversight (Romans 15:14; Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2; Hebrews 10:24-25; 13:17; James 5:16). Therefore, this church encourages and enjoins its members to make confession to and seek counsel from each other and especially from our Elders. We believe the Bible provides thorough guidance and instruction for faith and life. Therefore, our counseling shall be based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry.

Although some members of the church work in professional fields outside the church, when serving as pastoral or lay counselors within the church they do not provide the same kind of professional advice and services that they do when they are hired in their professional capacities. Therefore, members who have significant legal, financial, medical, or other technical questions should seek advice from independent professionals. Our pastoral and lay counselors shall be available to cooperate with such advisors and help members to consider their advice in the light of relevant scriptural principles.

Confidentiality: The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect (Matthew 7:12). It also discourages harmful gossip, invites confession, and encourages people to seek needed counseling (Proverbs 11:13; 16:28; 26:20). Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of this church, all members are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidences of others. In particular, our Elders shall carefully protect all information that they receive through pastoral counseling, subject to the following guidelines.

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when the Elders of this church believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

1. When an Elder is uncertain of how to counsel a person about a particular problem and needs to seek advice from other Elders in this church or Elders/Pastors from another church that that person may attend (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22);
2. When the person who disclosed the information or any other person is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene (Proverbs 24:11-12);
3. When a person refuses to repent of sin and it becomes necessary to institute disciplinary proceedings (Matthew 18:15-20) or seek the assistance of individuals or agencies outside this church (see, e.g., Romans 13:1-5); or
4. When required by law to report on a specific crime, such as child abuse.

Scripture commands that confidential information is to be shared with others only when a problem cannot be resolved through the efforts of a small group of people within the church (Matthew 18:15-17). Therefore, except as stated above, an Elder may not disclose confidential information to anyone outside this church without the approval of the Board of Elders or the consent of the person who originally disclosed the information. The Board of Elders may approve such disclosure only when it finds that all internal efforts to resolve a problem have been exhausted and the problem cannot be satisfactorily resolved without the assistance of individuals or agencies outside this church. This limitation shall apply to but is not limited to the giving of testimony in a court of law and the reporting of abuse.

Conflict Resolution: This church is committed to resolving in a biblical manner all disputes that may arise within our body. This commitment is based on God's command that Christians should strive earnestly to live at peace with one another (Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18) and that when disputes arise, Christians should resolve them according to the principles set forth in Holy Scripture (Matthew 5:23-25; 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). We teach that these commands and principles are obligatory on all Christians and absolutely essential for the well-being and work of the church. Therefore, any and all disputes in this church shall be resolved according to biblical principles, as provided in this bylaw.

ARTICLE VI Church Discipline

Purpose of Church Discipline: The threefold purpose of church discipline is to glorify God by maintaining purity in the local church, to build up believers by deterring sin, and to promote the spiritual welfare of the offending believer by calling him/her to return to a biblical standard of doctrine and conduct. (1 Peter 1:15,16; 1 Timothy 5:20; Matthew 18:15)

Process of Church Discipline: Those who teach or disseminate false doctrine, or who engage in conduct that violates Scripture, whether they are members or other professing Christians who regularly attend or fellowship with this church, shall be subject to church discipline and possible dismissal from fellowship in accordance with the principles outlined in Matthew 18:15-18.

When a member of this church has a conflict with, or is concerned about the belief and/or behavior of another member, he shall first prayerfully examine himself (Matthew 7:3-5) and seek to discern whether the offense is so serious that it cannot be overlooked

(Proverbs 19:11; 1 Peter 4:8). However, if the offense is too serious to overlook, then the offended or concerned person shall (1) go and talk with the offender personally and privately, seeking his/her repentance and restoration (Matthew 18:15). However, if the erring individual does not listen to such an overture and the offense continues to be too serious to overlook, then (2) the concerned member shall again go to the erring individual, seeking his or her repentance, but this time accompanied by one or two other individuals (either members of the church and/or church officials) who shall confirm that the sin has occurred or is continuing to occur, and that the erring individual has been appropriately confronted and has refused to repent (Matthew 18:16).

If the erring individual still refuses to heed this warning, then (3) it shall be brought to the attention of the Board of Elders (see Article VII). If the Board of Elders determines, after thorough investigation, that there is corroborating evidence that the erring individual has sinned or is continuing to sin, that he or she has been appropriately confronted, and that he or she has refused to repent, then the Elders shall inform the church that the church may call the erring individual to repentance and restoration (Matthew 18:17). If the erring individual does not listen to the church in its collective call to repentance, then (4) he or she shall be dismissed from the fellowship and/or membership of the church at a regularly scheduled worship service (Matthew 18:17). If the erring individual, after such dismissal, heeds the warning, demonstrates repentance, and requests reinstatement before the Board of Elders, then he or she may be publicly restored to all the rights, duties, privileges, and responsibilities of fellowship and/or membership.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the Elders, in the exercise of their discretion, may proceed directly to the third stage of church discipline, (i.e., the informing of the church thereof at a regularly scheduled worship service in order that the church may call the erring individual to repentance) or to the fourth stage of church discipline, (i.e., the dismissal from the fellowship and/or membership of the church) when one or more of the following have occurred:

- a. Where the transgression and the refusal to repent have been public, i.e., openly and to the offense of the whole church (1 Corinthians 5:1-5);
- b. Where the erring party has taught or otherwise disseminated doctrine contrary to Scripture, then chosen to disregard the direction and reproof of the Elders (Romans 16:17); or
- c. Where the erring party has been warned regarding factious and divisive conduct and has chosen to disregard that warning (Titus 3:10-11).

Other related considerations: The members of this church, and all other professing Christians who regularly attend or fellowship with this church, agree that the methods of church discipline outlined above and based on Matthew 18:15-18 are exclusive. Therefore, no cause of action or claim arising out of church discipline, including dismissal, public statements made to others in the course of church discipline, or other forms of discipline, may be brought before any court or tribunal outside this church.

Also, separate and apart from the process of church discipline, but subject to the discretion and approval of the Elders, a member, non-member regular attendee, or other individual may be notified that he or she is not to be present upon church premises for such a period of time as is deemed necessary for the safety and well-being of others on church premises. Such required absence may, but need not, be concurrent with church discipline of that person.

ARTICLE VII Church Officers

Elders and their number: Elders are the official overseers and pastors within the church. Theirs is the specific task of guiding the church spiritually and shepherding the congregation, “admonishing the unruly, encouraging the faint-hearted, helping the weak, being patient with everyone.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14) Cow Creek shall have a minimum of three Elders or up to a maximum of twenty Elders as deemed necessary by the Elders to adequately minister to and represent the needs of the church.

Their qualifications: *First*, a man’s godliness and maturity must be clearly demonstrated. The qualifications of an Elder are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. There are twenty specific marks of character that are to be consistently demonstrated before a man is to be considered for the position of Elder. *Second*, his ability to shepherd and teach, his love and devotion to God’s people, and his desire and ability to lead God’s people should be obvious to the congregation by his work of ministry prior to formal recognition and calling. And *third*, a man selected for the office of Elder must be a member of Cow Creek in good standing and in full support of Cow Creek’s Constitution & Bylaws.

Their recognition: Our goal as a church is the recognition of men whom the Holy Spirit has made overseers. When the biblical evidence is considered, it is clear that Elders are ultimately raised up by the Holy Spirit, not by man (Acts 20:28). The process of the public recognition of Elders should in reality be an acknowledgment of the work the Holy Spirit has already accomplished. The recognition process includes the following:

1. **Elders recognize the need for leadership.** Elders have the responsibility to oversee the congregation. As such, they play the central and leading role in the process of raising up new Elders. While church members may certainly suggest themselves or other men for eldership, it is the Elders who exercise the discretion in whether or not to pursue a particular man for this office.
2. **The congregation is taught the responsibilities of Elders and its role in the process.** The congregation is taught what constitutes qualified leaders. The presence of godly character (1 Timothy 3:1-7), the work of shepherding, and the congregation’s confidence in the man must be clearly perceived. The congregation is also taught their responsibility and role in the selection process. We regard the general consensus of the membership as critically important confirmation of whom the Holy Spirit is or isn’t raising up as an Elder.
3. **The Elders invite qualified nominees to consider serving the congregation as overseers.** The invitation will be given only to those whom the Elders judge have met the specific qualifications for the office. After much discussion, prayer and consideration, and only after coming to unanimous agreement, the Elders will extend the invitation for a man to consider beginning the process toward potentially becoming an Elder (1 Timothy 5:22).
4. **The prospective Elder will be interviewed and examined.** The interview and examination of the candidate is in three key areas. *First*, a personal interview is made with the candidate and his wife (if married). This is to answer any questions they have and to give them a clear picture of the responsibilities and duties that go with eldership. It is also done in consideration of the fact that an Elder’s wife will be called upon to make many special sacrifices that many wives are not able or willing to

make. The support and encouragement of the wife is absolutely essential. *Second*, an Elder must be able to wholeheartedly support Cow Creek's Constitution & Bylaws (particularly "The Affirmation of Faith"). A clear, unified voice must be heard from the Elders in all areas. And *third*, there is a meeting in which the Elders, Deacons and other recognized ministry leaders meet with the prospective Elder for an opportunity for questions. The prospective Elder is asked to respond to any and all questions regarding his doctrinal position, his philosophy of ministry, and his qualifications to serve as an Elder.

5. **The congregation is informed of the candidate(s) for Elder.** The next step is the public announcement of the candidate/s for Elder. The congregation's role here is critical. They must evaluate whether they will submit to the leadership of the prospective Elder. The prospective Elder is presented to the congregation and the congregation is asked to join prayerfully in consideration of this appointment and express its support or reservations. Over a period of 2-3 weeks, members are given opportunity to show cause as to why any prospective Elder should not be set apart to eldership. Any reservations must be communicated in person, not by means of an anonymous note.
6. **The process is saturated with prayer.** There must be active involvement in prayer. Since a God-given confirmation of those the Holy Spirit has raised up is essential, the entire process must be done in the context of prayer. This stresses the vital importance of the selection. The Elders themselves must commit themselves to prayer, recognizing the decision is critical to the welfare of the congregation.
7. **Confirmation is given by consensus of church members.** The next step is the consensus of Cow Creek's membership. If the response of the members is a strong positive consensus, the Elders will consider it a commitment from the Holy Spirit and proceed to ordination.
8. **The public ordination is granted to serve the church.** The last step is to follow the biblical pattern of ordination where the approved Elder is set apart for ministry by the laying on of hands (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 5:22). This is an act of identification and blessing. This public act confirms the appointment and invests a man with authority to serve as Elder.

Their term and the termination of office: The Elders shall serve for an indefinite term. Termination of an Elder's normal term of office may occur for several reasons. *First*, an Elder may desire to be relieved from office either temporarily or permanently if he feels unwilling or unable to serve for any reason. *Second*, an Elder's office may also be terminated for failure to continue to display the qualifications required in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. When an Elder ceases to meet those qualifications, he shall be asked by the Elders to step aside for a time so that he may get his life in order in that area. Such a request from the other Elders shall be made only when they are in unanimous agreement. And *third*, his office may be terminated when general church discipline is brought according to biblical principles. However, no accusation is to be taken seriously unless there are two or three witnesses (1 Timothy 5:19). If, however, an Elder is confronted in the manner prescribed by Matthew 18:15-18 and he continues in sin, he is to be rebuked by the other Elders before the whole assembly, so that others may fear (1 Timothy 5:20). The process of his possible reinstatement at a later time will be determined by the Elders in relation to the attendant circumstances.

Their responsibilities: The oversight and responsibilities of Elders can be categorized in four areas.

1. **The *purpose* and general direction of the church:** The Elders have the responsibility to oversee, guard and preserve the general purpose, direction and development of the church body according to the Word of God. To accomplish this they have responsibility for the teaching of the Scriptures and training by word and by example.
2. **The *policies* of the church:** They have the responsibilities of being and causing others to be good stewards of God's resources, both of money and of time. This entails the following further responsibilities:
 - a. Approving the annual budget and safeguarding the collection and distribution of funds through appropriate financial policies and controls.
 - b. Establishing and causing to be developed and maintained the appropriate committees and policies to enhance stewardship and organization in the church.
 - c. All transactions and activities by Elders and Deacons will be subject to review and ratification by the Elders.
3. **The *personnel* of the church:** Elders also have the responsibility to oversee the personnel and leadership development of the church. This includes the following:
 - a. Approving the appointment of all officers and major ministry leaders. This includes Elders, Deacons and other key ministry positions.
 - b. Approving the selection and hiring of pastoral, office and other church staff. The Elders also bear the responsibility of evaluating any and all church staff, and bear the right for terminating any staff personnel per the unanimous decision of the Board.
4. **The *purity* of the church:** Elders are also responsible for preserving the purity of the church. They maintain and cause to be maintained church discipline according to the principles and purpose of the Word of God.

Equality and diversity among Elders: Two things are recognized in the functioning of the Elders as a governing council:

1. **Decisional equality:** The standing and authority of each Elder is equal in the decision making process. The opinion of each man is of equal weight and must be considered before proceeding and decisions may only be made when unanimity exists among the Elders regarding the proposed decision.
2. **Functional diversity:** Distinct from decisional equality is functional diversity. This recognizes the presence of the differing gifts and abilities of each Elder. The arrangement of their ministries and roles in the church and their function on the board reflect their individual gifts. The Elders recognize these differing roles and demonstrate it by their mutual submission to one another.

Special & Regular Meetings of the Board of Elders: The Elders shall meet each December for the purpose of selecting officers among the Elders for the coming year (as required by state law). These officers will include a chairman and secretary/treasurer. The offices of chairman and secretary/treasurer shall not be held by the same person. The separation of duties between these officers shall be determined among the Elders. Notice of regular and special meetings of the Elders shall be given to each Elder at least three (3) days in advance, so that all may arrange to attend. When an emergency meeting is required, the previous stipulation (of three days notice) may be deemed to be fulfilled when all

Elders have been notified and verbal agreement has been given by all the Elders for the meeting to go forward (with or without all present). Normally, meetings will be called by the chairman. All matters before the Elders will be determined by the prayerful agreement of the Elders present. Exception: In matters of the salary or the discipline of an Elder or the members of his immediate family, the Elder in question must abstain. A simple majority of the Elders shall constitute a quorum.

The evaluation of Elders: Related to an Elder's term of office is the need for evaluation and accountability. Recognizing the importance of the office and the temptations and rigors that accompany it, the Elders must regularly seek to hold each other accountable. The objective is to see that the office is fulfilled in a manner consistent with the New Testament standard. Not only that, but Cow Creek's membership is also directed to follow the instruction of 1 Timothy 5:19-20 in regard to a concern(s) or charge(s) they may have regarding an Elder. Continuance in the office of Elder is dependent upon a man meeting the biblical qualifications for the office; his own desires; and, his ability to fulfill his ministry.

Their oversight and the relation of the congregation: *First*, Elder governance means that the shepherds are to lead the sheep, not the sheep the shepherds. The congregation, therefore, is to submit to its Elders (Hebrews 13:17). When godly Elders minister diligently, effectively and consistently, they deserve the congregation's love, respect and obedience (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:17). The congregation will not fight them, but follow them in unity and harmony. *Second*, in Elder governance, the necessity of the unified support and following of the congregation is recognized. The Elders' role is to discern Christ's direction for the congregation. If the Elders are following Christ's direction, it will generally be born out in the unified support of the congregation. Therefore, in major decisions affecting the entire church, the input and consensus of church members is sought. Major decisions involve such areas as the following: (1) the purchase of property and real estate, (2) the hiring of full time pastoral staff, (3) the annual budget, and (4) the recognition of church officers. In such cases, the matter will be presented at a meeting for church members. After discussion and questions, a period of two to three weeks will be given for input, feedback and the expression of reservations and questions. The Elders will typically not proceed unless a clear consensus is discerned from the church membership.

Staff Elders/Pastors: Cow Creek holds to the biblical conviction that, by definition, Elders are Pastors and Pastors are Elders. Thus, whether an Elder/Pastor is staff (paid) or lay (volunteer), the principle of "decisional equality" applies to all. However, as stated above, we recognize functional diversity amongst the Elders. And, per the needs within the church and the time necessary for pastoral attention toward those needs, Cow Creek recognizes the legitimacy and necessity of having certain paid staff Elders/Pastors. For example: a primary Teaching/Administrative Pastor; Pastor of Parent & Children's Discipleship; Youth Pastor; Worship Pastor; etc. While staff Elder/Pastors have their specific realms of responsibility and functional diversity, they must still work with the Board of Elders as with a group of peers and equals.

The hiring of pastoral staff: As the spiritual overseers of the congregation, the Elders bear the responsibility of determining Cow Creek's need/s for pastoral staff and the search for such staff. In this process the Elders shall (1) inform Cow Creek's membership of a proposed staff need and job description, and invite members' input; (2) attempt to see if Cow Creek's needs for pastoral staff might be met by those within our own ranks who have been nurtured at Cow Creek; (3) if an outside candidate is sought and serious consideration given by the Elder Board, then the membership shall be afforded as much

exposure to the candidate as is reasonable, and the Elders shall invite their input as to the suitability of the candidate for the position; (4) the hiring of a man to a staff Pastor position shall only occur when the Elders are unanimous in such a decision and the membership is of clear consensus; and, (5) only after a proving period of 6 months shall a staff Pastor, per the unanimous agreement of the Elder Board and the consensus of the membership, be ordained as an Elder with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities entailed.

The evaluation of pastoral staff: The same principles and process of evaluation as applied to Elders (see above) is to be applied to any and all pastoral staff.

The term and termination of pastoral staff: The same principles for the term and termination of Elders (see above) is to be applied to any and all pastoral staff. As well, any and all pastoral staff are to be reviewed yearly by the Elder Board as to their ministry satisfaction, ministry performance, and salary structure (salary structures of staff Elder/Pastors being determined by non-staff Elder/Pastors). If a staff Pastor or staff Pastor/Elder is determined to be disqualified from ministry and/or fails to meet the approval of the Elder Board as to their ministry performance, etc., then the Elder Board reserves the right to dismiss that staff person per the unanimous decision of the other Elders.

Deacons and their number: Deacons are official “servants” within the church. They help the Elders to minister to the congregation in a host of practical and personal ways. They do not share in the governing of the congregation with the Elders, but have authority delegated to them by the Elders to oversee specific tasks and functions in the church. The number of Deacons at Cow Creek shall be as many as deemed necessary by the Elders.

Their qualifications: *First*, a man selected for the office of Deacon must possess a godly reputation, be filled with the Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3), and be a good manager of his own households (see the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:8-13). *Second*, he must already have a proven history of ministering to God’s people prior to formal recognition and appointment. And *third*, he must be a member of Cow Creek in good standing and in full support of Cow Creek’s Constitution & Bylaws.

Their recognition: The process toward the public recognition of a man for the office of Deacon is similar to that of a man for Eldership. Again, our goal as a church is the recognition of men whom the Holy Spirit is bringing into increased responsibilities of service. The following is typical of the recognition process:

1. **Elders recognize the need for servants.** Elders have the responsibility to oversee the congregation. As such, they play the central and leading role in the process of raising up new Deacons. While church members may certainly suggest themselves or others for this office, it is still the Elders who exercise the discretion in whether or not to pursue a particular man for this office.
2. **The Elders invite qualified nominees to consider serving the church as a Deacon.** The invitation will be given only to those whom the Elders judge have met the specific qualifications for the office. After much discussion, prayer and consideration, and only after coming to unanimous agreement, the Elders will extend the invitation for a man to consider beginning the process toward potentially becoming a Deacon.
3. **The congregation is informed of the candidate(s) for the office of Deacon.** The next step is the public announcement of the candidate/s for this office. The congregation’s evaluation of the suitability of a man for the office is essential. Over a period of 2-3 weeks, members are given opportunity to show cause as

to why any prospective man should not be set apart for this office. Again, any reservations must be communicated in person, not by means of an anonymous note.

4. **Confirmation is given by consensus of church members.** The next step is the consensus of Cow Creek's membership. If the response of the members is a strong positive consensus, the Elders will consider it a commitment from the Holy Spirit and proceed to ordination.
5. **The public ordination is granted to serve the church.** The last step is for the Elders to lay hands upon a man following the biblical pattern of ordination (Acts 14:23; 1 Timothy 5:22). This is an act of identification and blessing. This public act confirms the appointment and invests a man with authority to serve as a Deacon.

The evaluation of Deacons: Related to a Deacon's term of office is the need for evaluation and accountability. Recognizing the importance of the office and the temptations and rigors that accompany it, the Elders must regularly seek to hold each Deacon accountable. The objective is to see that the office is fulfilled in a manner consistent with the New Testament standard. Not only that, but Cow Creek's membership is also directed to bring any concern(s) or charge(s) it may have regarding a Deacon to Cow Creek's Elder board (in similar keeping with 1 Timothy 5:19-20). The term and termination of a man in the office of Deacon shall be basically the same as that for the office of an Elder. Continuance in the office of Deacon is dependent upon a man meeting the biblical qualifications for the office; his own desires; and, his ability to fulfill his ministry.

Indemnification of Officers:

- A. The Board of Elders may choose to indemnify and advance the church-related expenses of any officer, employee, or agent of the church.
- B. Subject to the provisions of paragraph C. of this section, the church shall indemnify any Elder or Deacon or former Elder or Deacon of the church against claims, liabilities, expenses, and costs necessarily incurred by them in connection with the defense, compromise, or settlement of any action, suit or proceeding, civil or criminal, in which such person is made a party by reason of being or having been an Elder or Deacon, to the extent not otherwise compensated, indemnified or reimbursed by insurance, if:
 - 1) The conduct of the Elder or Deacon was in good faith;
 - 2) The Elder or Deacon reasonably believed that their conduct was in the best interests of the church, or at least not opposed to its best interests; and
 - 3) In the case of any criminal proceeding, the Elder or Deacon had no reasonable cause to believe that his conduct was unlawful.
- C. The church may not indemnify an Elder or Deacon in connection with a proceeding brought against them by or in the right of the church, in which they were adjudged liable to the church, or where the Elder or Deacon is charged with receiving an improper personal benefit and is adjudged liable on that basis.

ARTICLE VIII

Official Meetings

Annual meetings: The membership shall meet annually (in January) for the purpose of the presentation of the annual budget and annual financial report (this church operates fiscally on a calendar year). This will typically be an opportune time for church leadership to review and discuss with church membership items of consideration and concern for the coming year. Notice of the meeting shall be given by the Elders to the congregation two weeks in advance in the Sunday bulletin.

Other official meetings: Other official meetings may be called as needed by the Elders. Notice shall be given in the bulletin, or from the pulpit at least one (1) week in advance.

The purpose of meetings for members: The purpose of meetings for members is understood in the light of the membership's relation to the Elders (see Hebrews 13:17). Their purpose can be seen from two perspectives:

- *First*, the purpose of meetings is to help ascertain congregational consensus or general affirmation concerning the proposals and plans presented by the Elders. The Elders submit proposals (See definition of "major decisions" under "Their oversight and the relation of the congregation," p. 16) already discussed in detail and agreed upon by them. The input and insight of the congregation will be considered both at the meeting and over a 2-3 week period before a decision will be made. Concerns must be given in person, not by an anonymous note. If the response of the congregation is not one of clear consensus, the recommendation will be tabled.
- *Second*, while discussion is certainly invited and sought from members, such meetings are not the place for decisions to be made. (See "Their oversight and the relation of the congregation," p. 12) Consensus among the members has the basic idea of "general agreement". Voting, as is seen in Congregational forms of government, is not a process that will be pursued in Cow Creek's official meetings.

Church Records: The Board of Elders (the Secretary as appointed by the Elders) shall keep the following records: (1) minutes of its meetings, including changes in the membership of the congregation; (2) minutes of the meetings of the congregation; (3) rolls of the members in the congregation, with the dates of their reception; (4) resolutions adopted by the Board of Elders; (5) appropriate accounting records; (6) its articles or restated articles of incorporation and all amendments to them currently in effect; and (7) its bylaws or restated bylaws and all amendments to them currently in effect. Such records shall be kept in the church office.

A member shall be entitled to inspect and copy, at a reasonable time and location specified by the Board of Elders, any of the church records described above, provided the Board of Elders finds that the member has a proper purpose and is acting in good faith. The Board of Elders may limit access to any records that contain confidential information about a particular person or persons.

ARTICLE IX

Amending the Bylaws

Amendments to this constitution may be made after a unanimous recommendation of the Elders and an affirmative consensus of the congregation. Notice of any proposed amendments must be made at least four weeks prior to the date of their intended adoption. During that period, any member with concern or evidence that the contemplated change is not God's will may make this known to the Elders in writing. Objections to the amendment will then be discussed openly at the meeting of the congregation for adoption.

ARTICLE X

Ownership & Disposal of Property

Ownership: The church shall hold, own, and enjoy its own personal and real property, without any right of reversion to another entity, except as provided in these Bylaws.

Disposal of property: In the event of the dissolution of this corporation (that is, the disbanding of the church so that it no longer functions as a congregation or as a corporate entity), its property shall be applied and distributed as follows:

1. All debts and liabilities of the corporation are to be paid.
2. All remaining assets shall be distributed to a like religious non-profit fund(s), foundation(s), or corporation(s), which is organized and operated exclusively for religious purposes and which has established its tax exempt status under section 501(C) (3) of the United States Internal Revenue code.
3. Under no condition shall any part of the assets of this organization accrue to the benefit of any private person.

Method of disposal: At the time of dissolution, the current membership of the church shall approve the recipient(s) of the assets of this corporation.

This Constitution & Bylaws unanimously revised and approved by the
Elders of Cow Creek Community Church on August 25, 2005
Amended January 20, 2008
Amended May 4, 2014
Amended January 31, 2016
Amended March 25, 2019