

# **Constitution**

## **Living Water Bible Fellowship**

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## **ARTICLE I: DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF THIS CONSTITUTION**

This written document is a declaration of our beliefs and understanding of the Holy Scripture, as to our doctrinal beliefs, form of church government, organizational structure, and purposes as a body. It is vitally important for a church, if it is to glorify God and accomplish His purposes, that its people be in agreement with regard to doctrine, organizational structure and goals (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:3, 13).

This is thus designed to be a statement of these things that it might promote a oneness of mind within our own ranks, and that those interested in becoming a part of this ministry might have a clear concept of our beliefs and objectives.

This document is not a higher authority than the Word of God. Neither is it a higher authority than the authority that God Himself has invested in those believers He has appointed to lead in this local church (Heb. 13:17). It must be remembered that the local church itself is a living, growing, and flexible body subject ultimately to the authority of Jesus Christ alone as it is declared in the Word of God (Eph. 1:22; 4:12-16). As we grow in the Word, this document is therefore subject to amendment according to the provisions of Article XIV. This document is, however, to be followed in all its parts as a protection to all until part of all is amended according to its provisions.

## **ARTICLE II: NAME**

The name of this local church shall be Living Water Bible Fellowship (an Evangelical Free Church), a corporation under the laws of the state of Iowa.

## **ARTICLE III: MISSION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **A. Our Mission**

The supreme mission of the church, and so also of every individual believer, is to glorify God and to serve Him forever (Eph. 3:21; Rom. 11:36; 1 Pet. 4:11). Therefore, if what we do as a church, or as individuals, cannot serve the glory of God, it should not be done.

### **B. Our Goals**

Our goals are to serve God and bring glory to Him. Certain God-ordained goals are established in Scripture for the local church. These are basically set forth in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20).

#### **1. Equipping Believers**

Equipping the saints unto the work of the ministry in all its aspects along with their spiritual maturity in the Lord is the second great goal of this church (Eph. 4:12-16; Col. 1:28-29).

#### **2. Evangelization of the Lost**

Reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ, both at home and abroad, is to be one of the goals of this church (Rom. 1:14-16; 1 Thess. 1:8; Acts 1:8).

### **C. Our Objectives**

#### **1. Internal Objectives and Functions**

- a. Instruction in the Word of God—Teaching:** To stand for the historic, fundamental truths of Scripture, and through Scripture, to equip the saints for service, and for the building up of the body of Christ for unity, knowledge of the Son of God, and maturity, measured by the stature of the fullness of Christ, and for protection against the deceitful scheming of Satan (Eph. 4:12-16).
- b. Fellowship:** To encourage and provide for means of developing meaningful relationships among believers (expressions of sharing and caring for, and loving one another, warning, stimulating, and encouraging one another to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24-25; 13:1-2; Acts 2:42-47).
- c. Worship:** To provide the means for developing and expressing meaningful worship in prayer, songs of praise, adoration, admonishment, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, and to administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper (Heb. 13:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:23-34; Matt. 28:19; Acts 2:42).
- d. Ministry:** To provide the means for developing and exercising spiritual gifts for the edification of the body and the evangelization of the lost (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

## 2. External Objectives and Functions

- a. **Outreach:** To present the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who have never trusted in Jesus Christ as their Savior, and to encourage them to trust in Him (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:2-10).
- b. **Holy Behavior:** To live holy lives in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation acting as salt and as lights in the world (Phil. 2:15; Matt. 5:13-14; 1 Pet. 2:11-15; Col. 4:5).
- c. **Showing Mercy:** To do good to all men whenever there is the opportunity and the means to do so within biblical principles and precepts (Gal. 6:10; Luke 10:29-37).

Our **mission, goals and objectives** set forth our philosophy of the local church and its ministry. This, in turn, must form the foundation for our thinking and activities as a body of people. It directs us in what we ought to be doing. Anything which does not contribute to this philosophy of our mission, goals and objectives should then be either corrected, rejected or alleviated from the activities of the church.

## ARTICLE IV: DOCTRINE

Since the Word of God is foundational and absolutely essential to true spirituality, fellowship, spiritual sustenance, effectiveness in service and ministry, faith and doctrinal accuracy, we believe that the most important function of this local church, and its central thrust, is consistent teaching and study of the Word of God (1 Tim. 4:6-7).

The study of the Word of God is not **an end in itself**, but it is a high priority and a necessary channel for fellowship with God and thereby also of effective ministry to one another and to the world. It will not therefore, be bypassed or made secondary in the interest of social concerns, actions, or activities, but must be so promoted that the Word, and the teaching of the Word, become the pulse and heartbeat behind all church and non-church related activities or concerns (Psa. 119:1ff; 138:2; Isa. 77:2b; Rom. 15:4; 16:25-26; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 1:5; 4:1-16; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 4:1-3).

This local church shall thus function as an independent, evangelical Bible church, committed to the fundamental, historic truths recorded in God's inerrant revelation – the Holy Scriptures. To hold positions within Living Water Bible Fellowship, all elders, ministerial staff, deacons and teachers must wholeheartedly agree with the Doctrinal Statement, Article V, of this church.

## ARTICLE V: DOCTRINAL STATEMENT

### A. Statement of Faith

The Statement of Faith of this church shall be the same as that of the Central District of/ and the Evangelical Free Church of America, which reads as follows:

*The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions:*

#### 1) God

We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

#### 2) The Bible

We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

#### 3) The Human Condition

We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

#### 4) Jesus Christ

We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus – Israel's promised Messiah – was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

## **5) The Work of Christ**

We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

## **6) The Holy Spirit**

We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

## **7) The Church**

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

## **8) Christian Living**

We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

## **9) Christ's Return**

We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

## **10) Response and Eternal Destiny**

We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.

## **B. Distinctive Teaching**

Holding to the statement of faith (Article V, Section A.), the teaching of Living Water Bible Fellowship will be further characterized by the following:

### **1) The Scriptures**

We believe that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," by which we understand the whole Bible is inspired in the sense that holy men of God "were moved by the Holy Spirit" to write the very words of Scripture. We believe that while there was progress in revelation from God, this divine inspiration extends equally and fully to all parts of the writings—historical, poetical, doctrinal, prophetic and to the smallest word and inflection of a word as appeared in the original manuscripts. We believe that the whole Bible in the originals is therefore without error.

We believe that all Scriptures center about the Lord Jesus Christ in His person and work in His first and second coming, and hence that no portion, even of the Old Testament, is properly read or understood until it leads to Him. We also believe that all the Scriptures were designed for our practical instruction (Matt. 5:18; Mark 12:26, 36; 13:11; Luke 24:27, 44; John 5:39; Acts 1:16; 17:2-3; 18:28; 26:22-23; 28:23; Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 2:13; 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

### **2) The Godhead**

We believe that the Godhead eternally exists in three persons—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—and that these three are one God, having precisely the same nature, attributes and perfections, and worthy of precisely the same homage, confidence and obedience (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 12:29; John 1:14; Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 13:14; Heb. 1:1-3; Rev. 1:4-6).

### **3) Angels, Fallen and Unfallen**

We believe that God created an innumerable company of sinless, spiritual beings known as angels; that one, "Lucifer, son of the morning," the highest in rank, sinned through pride thereby becoming Satan; that a great company of the

angels followed him in his moral fall, some of whom became demons and are active as his agents and associates in the prosecution of his unholy purposes, while others who fell are “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Isa. 14:12-17; Ezek. 28:11-19; 1 Tim. 3:6; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:3-4).

We believe that Satan is the originator of sin, and that under the permission of God and as the adversary of God and His character, he through subtlety led our first parents into transgression, thereby accomplishing their moral fall and subjecting them and their posterity to his own power; that he is the enemy of God and the people of God opposing and exalting himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped; and that he who in the beginning said, “I will be like the most High,” in his warfare appears as an angel of light even counterfeiting the works of God by fostering political and religious movements and systems of doctrine, which systems are characterized by such as the denial of God, the person and work of Christ as the God-man substitute or salvation by grace alone (Gen. 3:1-19; Rom. 5:12-14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; 11:3-4, 13-15; Eph. 6:10-12; 2 Thess. 2:4; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 1 John 4:1-3).

We believe that Satan was judged at the cross, though not then executed, and that he, a usurper, now rules as the “god of this world;” that at the second coming of Christ, Satan will be bound and cast into the abyss for a thousand years and after the thousand years he will be loosed for a little season and then “cast into the lake of fire and brimstone” where he “shall be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Col. 2:15; Rev. 20:1-3, 10).

We believe that a great company of angels kept their holy estate and are before the throne of God from whence they are sent forth as ministering spirits to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation (Luke 15:10; Eph. 1:21; Heb. 1:14; Rev. 7:11-12).

We believe that man was made lower than the angels and, that in His incarnation, Christ took for a little time this lower place that He might lift the believer to His own sphere above the angels (Heb. 2:6-10).

#### **4) Man Created and Fallen**

We believe that man was created by God as a human being, and did not evolve from a lower order of life. We believe that man was originally created in the image and after the likeness of God, and that he fell through sin and, as a consequence of his sin, lost his spiritual life becoming dead in trespasses and sins, and that he became subject to the power of the devil. We also believe that his spiritual death, or totally depraved human nature, has been transmitted to the entire human race of man, the Man Christ Jesus alone being excepted; and hence that every child of Adam is born into the world with a nature which not only possesses no spark of divine life, but is essentially and unchangeable bad apart from divine grace (Gen. 1:26; 2:17; 6:5; Psalm 14:1-3; 51:5; Jer. 17:9; John 3:6; 5:40; 6:53; Rom. 3:10-19; 8:6-7; Eph. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 5:6; 1 John 3:8).

#### **5) The Dispensations**

We believe that the dispensations are stewardships by which God administers His purposes on the earth through man under varying responsibilities. We believe that the changes in the dispensational dealings of God with man depend upon changed conditions or situations in which man is successively found with relation to God, and that these changes are the result of the failures of man and the judgments of God. We believe that different administrative responsibilities of this character are manifest in the biblical record, that they span the entire history of mankind, and that each ends in the failure of man under the respective test and in an ensuring judgment from God. We believe that three of these dispensations of rules of life are the subject of extended revelation in the Scriptures—the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, the present dispensation of the church, and the future dispensation of the millennial kingdom. We believe that these are distinct and are not to be intermingled or confused, as they are chronologically successive.

We believe that the dispensations are not ways of salvation nor different methods of administering the so-called Covenant of Grace. They are not in themselves dependent on covenant relationships but are ways of life and responsibility to God which test the submission of man to His revealed will during a particular time. We believe that if man does trust in his own efforts to gain the favor of God or salvation under any dispensational test, because of inherent sin, his failure to satisfy fully the just requirements of God is inevitable and his condemnation sure.

We believe that according to the “eternal purpose” of God (Eph. 3:11), salvation in the divine reckoning is always “by grace through faith,” and rests upon the basis of the shed blood of Christ. We believe that God has always been gracious, regardless of the particular dispensation in effect at any point in history, but that man has not at all times in past history been under the dispensation of grace (the Church is presently under this dispensation of grace) (1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 3:2, 9 [NASV]; Col. 1:25; 1 Tim. 1:4 [NASV]).

We believe that it has always been true that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6), and that Old Testament saints were saved by faith in a coming Savior and Redeemer. However, due to the progress of revelation, it was historically impossible for them to comprehend to the same extent as we do, the nature of the prophecies and sacrifices that they portrayed, the incarnate, crucified Son, the Lamb of God. We believe that they did have some understanding of the prophecies and types of the suffering Savior and other details (1 Pet. 1:10-12). This faith, vague as it was, was counted unto them for righteousness (Rom. 4:3-8; Gen. 15:1).

## **6) The First Advent**

We believe that, as provided and purposed by God and as preannounced in the prophecies of the Scriptures, the eternal Son of God came into this world that He might manifest God to men, fulfill prophecy and become the Redeemer of a lost world. To this end He was born of the virgin and received a human body and a sinless human nature (Luke 1:30-35; John 1:18; 3:16; Heb. 4:15).

We believe that on the human side, He became and remained a perfect man but sinless throughout his life; yet He retained His absolute deity being at the same time very God and very man (Luke 2:40; John 1:1-2; Phil. 2:5-8), and that His earth-life sometimes functioned within the sphere of that which was human and sometimes within the sphere of that which was divine.

We believe that in fulfillment of prophecy, He came first to Israel as her Messiah-King, and that being rejected of that nation, He according to the eternal counsels of God, gave His life as a ransom for all (John 1:11; Acts 2:22-24; 1 Tim. 2:6).

We believe that in infinite love for the lost, He voluntarily accepted His Father's will and became the divinely provided sacrificial Lamb and took away the sin of the world, bearing the holy judgments against sin which the righteousness of God must impose. His death was therefore substitutionary in the most absolute sense—the just for the unjust—and by His death, He became the Savior of the lost (John 1:29; Rom. 3:25-26; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; Heb. 10:5-14; 1 Pet. 3:18).

We believe that according to the Scriptures, He arose from the dead in the same body, though glorified, in which He had lived and died, and that His resurrection body is the pattern of that body which ultimately will be given to all believers (John 20:20; Phil. 3:20-21).

We believe that on departing from the earth, He was accepted of His Father and that His acceptance is a final assurance to us that His redeeming work was perfectly accomplished (Heb. 1:3).

We believe that He became Head over all things to the church which is His body, and in this ministry He ceases not to intercede and advocate for the saved (Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

## **7) Salvation Only Through Christ**

We believe that, owing to universal death through sin, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless born again; and that no degree of reformation, however great, no attainments in morality, however high, no culture, however attractive, no baptism or other ordinance, however administered, can help the sinner to take even one step toward heaven; but a new nature imparted from above, a new life implanted by the Holy Spirit through the Word, is absolutely essential to salvation and only those thus saved are sons of God. We believe also that our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made to be sin and was made a curse for us, dying in our stead; and that no repentance, no feeling, no faith, no good resolutions, no sincere efforts, no submission to the rules and regulations of any church, nor all the churches that have existed since the days of the apostles, can add in the very least degree to the finished work wrought for us by Him who united in His person true and proper deity and perfect and sinless humanity (Lev. 17:11; Isa. 64:6; Matt. 26:28; Rom. 5:6-9; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 6:15; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 3:4-9; Titus 3:5,6; James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:18-19, 23).

We believe that the new birth of the believer comes only through faith in Christ and that repentance is a vital part of believing, and is in no way in itself a separate and independent condition of salvation; nor are any other acts, such as confession, baptism, prayer, or faithful service to be added to believing as a condition of salvation (John 1:12; 3:16, 18, 36; 5:24; 6:29; Acts 13:39; 16:31; Rom. 1:16-17; 3:22, 26; 4:5; 10:4; Gal. 3:22).

## 8) The Extent of Salvation

We believe that when an unregenerate person exercises that faith in Christ which is illustrated and described as such in the New Testament, he passes immediately out of spiritual death into spiritual life and from the old creation into the new; being justified from all things, accepted before the Father according as Christ His Son is accepted, loved as Christ is loved, having his place and portion linked to Him and one with Him forever. Though the saved one may have occasion to grow in the realization of his blessings and to know a fuller measure of divine power through the yielding of his life more fully to God, he is, as soon as he is saved, in possession of every spiritual blessing and absolutely complete in Christ, and is therefore in no way required by God to seek a so-called “second blessing” or a “second work of grace” (John 5:24; 17:23; Acts 13:39; Rom. 5:1; 1 Cor. 3:21-23; Eph. 1:3; Col. 2:10; 1 John 4:17; 5:11-12).

## 9) Sanctification

We believe that sanctification, which is a setting apart unto God, is three-fold: It is already complete for every person because his position toward God is the same as Christ’s position. Since the believer is in Christ, he is set apart unto God in the measure in which Christ is set apart unto God. We believe, however, that he retains his sin nature, which cannot be eradicated in this life. Therefore, while the standing of the Christian in Christ is perfect, his present state is no more perfect than his experience in daily life. There is therefore a progressive sanctification wherein the Christian is to “grow in grace” and to “be changed” by the unhindered power of the Spirit. We believe also that the child of God will yet be fully sanctified in his state as he is now sanctified in his standing in Christ when he shall see his Lord and shall be like Him (John 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Eph. 4:24; 5:25-27; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 10:10, 14; 12:10).

## 10) Eternal Security

We believe that, because of the eternal purpose of God toward the objects of His love, because of His freedom to exercise grace toward the meritless on the ground of the propitiatory blood of Christ, because of the very nature of the divine gift of eternal life, because of the present and unending intercession and advocacy of Christ in heaven, because of the immutability of the unchangeable covenants of God, because of the regenerating, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of all who are saved, we and all true believers everywhere, once saved shall be kept saved forever. We believe, however, that God is a holy and righteous Father and that since He cannot overlook the sins of His children, He will, when they persistently sin, chasten them and correct them in infinite love; but having undertaken to save them and keep them forever, apart from all human merit, He who cannot fail will in the end present every one of them faultless before the presence of His glory and conformed to the image of His Son (John 5:24; 10:28; 13:1; 14:16-17; 17:11; Eph. 1:13-14; 4:30; Rom. 8:29, 32-39; 1 Cor. 6:19; Heb. 7:25; 1 John 2:1-2; 5:13; Jude 24).

## 11) Assurance

We believe it is the privilege, not only of some, but of all who are born again by the Spirit through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, to be assured of their salvation from the very day they take Him to be their Savior; and that this assurance is not founded upon any fancied discovery of their own worthiness or fitness, but wholly upon the testimony of God in His written Word, exciting within His children filial love, gratitude and obedience (Luke 10:20; 22:32; Rom. 8:15-16; 2 Cor. 5:1, 6-8; 2 Tim. 1:12; Heb. 10:22, 23; 1 John 5:13).

## 12) The Holy Spirit

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the blessed Trinity, though omnipresent from all eternity, took up His abode in the world in a special sense on the day of Pentecost according to the divine promise, dwells in every believer and, by His baptism, unites all to Christ in one body and that He, as the indwelling One, is the source of all power and all acceptable worship and service. We believe that He never takes His departure from the church, nor from the feeblest of the saints, but is ever present to testify of Christ; seeking to occupy believers with Him and not with themselves nor with their experiences. We believe that His abode in the world in this special sense will cease when Christ comes to receive His own at the completion of the church (John 14:16-17; 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:22; 2 Thess. 2:7).

We believe that in this age, based on that which the Holy Spirit is to the believer, the Holy Spirit has certain well defined ministries, and that it is the duty of every Christian to understand what the Holy Spirit is to him, and does to him, and to be rightly adjusted to the Holy Spirit in his own life and experience. We believe that the Holy Spirit, as a special provision of God, is an **anointing** (2 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 2:20-27), a **seal** (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30), and an **earnest** (Eph. 1:14). His ministries to the Christian are the restraining of evil in the world to the measure of the divine will; the convicting of the world respecting sin, righteousness and judgment; the regenerating of all believers; the indwelling of all who are saved whereby they are sealed unto the day of redemption and anointed of God for service; the baptizing into the one body of Christ of all who are saved; and the continued filling for power, witnessing, teaching, leading, and service of those among the saved who are yielded to Him and who are subject to His will (John 3:6; 16:7-15; Acts 1:8; Rom. 8:3-14; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 4:30; 5:18; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 John 2:20-27).

We believe that some gifts of the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues and miraculous healings were given to be used as signs to authenticate the message of the first century church. We believe that speaking in tongues was never the common or necessary sign of the baptism nor of the filling of the Spirit, and that the complete deliverance of the body from sickness or death awaits the consummation of our salvation in the resurrection (Acts 2:1-12; 4:8, 31; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 13:8; 2 Cor. 12:12). We believe that in accordance with the sovereign will of God, healing is available through the prayer of believers (James 5:14). We believe that other non-sign gifts were given to the church and that through the exercise of these gifts in the church, believers who learn and apply the truth of Scripture to their lives will mature spiritually. We further believe that ecstatic experiences, though they may be valid manifestations of the grace of God, do not appreciably contribute to one's spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Pet. 2:2).

### **13) The Church, A Unity of Believers**

#### ***a) The Universal Church***

We believe that the church is composed of all who are united by the Holy Spirit to the risen and ascended Son of God, that by the same Spirit we are all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, and thus being members one of another, we are responsible to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, rising above all sectarian prejudices and denominational bigotry, and loving one another with a pure heart fervently (Matt. 16:16-18; Acts 2:42-47; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:20-23; 4:3-16; Col. 3:14-15).

#### ***b) The Local Church***

We believe that God's primary (intended) organization of believers, after the family unit, in the present age is local assemblies of believers, committed to the Lord and to each other for the purpose of carrying out the universal church's visible activities; that is, the communication of God's truth to the people of God, the worship of and prayer to God by God's people, the loving care of God's people for one another, and the spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth; that these assemblies (or churches), though they should endeavor to cooperate with other Christian assemblies, are to function under the lordship of Christ, free from external controls of any religious organizations beyond the early oversight by the church founders and the influence of its own mature leaders; and that it is God's intention that all believers publicly identify with a visible, local assembly (Acts 2:41-47; 4:19; 5:29; 1 Cor. 1:1-2; 1 Thess. 1:1; Heb. 10:24-25).

### **14) The Ordinances of the Church**

We believe that Christ, the head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22), has commanded us to baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19); and to partake at His table. When He had given thanks, he broke the bread and said, "this is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "this cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

### **15) The Christian's Walk**

We believe that we are called with a holy calling to walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit, and so to live in the power of the indwelling Spirit that we will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh. But the flesh with its fallen, Adamic nature, which in this life is never eradicated, being with us to the end of our earthly pilgrimage, needs to be kept by the Spirit constantly in subjection to Christ, or it will surely manifest its presence in our lives to the dishonor of our Lord (Rom. 6:11-13; 8:2, 4, 12-13; Gal. 5:16-23; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:1-10; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 1 John 1:4-7; 3:5-9).

### **16) The Christian's Service**

We believe that divine, enabling gifts for service are bestowed by the Spirit upon all who are saved. While there is a diversity of gifts, each believer is energized by the same Spirit and each is called to his own divinely appointed service as the Spirit may will. In the apostolic church, there were certain gifted men, i.e., apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers who were appointed by God for the perfecting of the saints unto their work of the ministry. We believe also that today some men are especially gifted of God to be evangelists and pastor-teachers, and that it is to the fulfilling of His will and to His eternal glory that these men shall be sustained and encouraged in their service for God (Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 4:11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

We believe that, wholly apart from salvation benefits which are bestowed equally upon all who believe, rewards are promised according to the faithfulness of each believer in his service for his Lord, and that these rewards will be bestowed at the judgment seat of Christ after He comes to receive His own to Himself (1 Cor. 3:9-15; 9:18-27; 2 Cor. 5:10).

## **17) The Great Commission**

We believe that it is the explicit message of our Lord Jesus Christ to those whom He has saved that they are sent forth by Him into the world even as He was sent forth of His Father into the world. We believe that after they are saved they are divinely reckoned to be related to this world as strangers and pilgrims, ambassadors and witnesses, and that their primary purpose in life should be to make Christ known to the world (Matt. 28:18-19; Mark 16:15; John 17:18; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20; 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11).

## **18) The Blessed Hope**

We believe that according to the Word of God the next great event in the fulfillment of prophecy will be the coming of the Lord in the air to receive to Himself into heaven both His own who are alive and remain unto His coming, and also all who have fallen asleep in Jesus, and that this event is the blessed hope set before us in Scripture, and for this we should be constantly looking (John 14:1-3; 1 Cor. 15:51-52; Phil. 3:20, 21; 1 Thess. 4:13-18; Tit. 2:11-14).

## **19) The Tribulation**

We believe that the translation of the church will be followed by the fulfillment of Israel's seventieth week (Dan. 9:27; Rev. 6:1-19:21) during which the church, the body of Christ, will be in heaven. The whole period of Israel's seventieth week will be a time of judgment on the whole earth, at the end of which the times of the Gentiles will be brought to a close. The latter half of this period will be the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), which our Lord called the great tribulation (Matt. 24:15-21). We believe that universal righteousness will not be realized previous to the second coming of Christ, but that the world is day by day ripening for judgment and that the age will end with a fearful apostasy.

## **20) The Second Coming of Christ**

We believe that the period of great tribulation in the earth will be climaxed by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth as He went, in person on the clouds of heaven, and with power and great glory to introduce the millennial age, to bind Satan and place him in the abyss, to lift the curse which now rests upon the whole creation, to restore Israel to her own land and to give her the realization of God's covenant promises, and to bring the whole world to the knowledge of God (Deut. 30:1-10; Isa. 11:9; Ezek. 37:21-28; Zech. 14:4; Matt. 24:15-25:46; Acts 15:16-17; Rom. 8:19-23; 11:25-27; Rev. 20:1-3).

## **21) The Eternal State**

We believe that at death the spirits and souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation pass immediately into His presence and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the glorified body when Christ comes for His own, whereupon soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in glory; but the spirits and souls of the unbelieving remain after death conscious of condemnation and in misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (Luke 16:19-26; 23:42, 43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 6-7; Rev. 14:10-11; 19:20; 20:10, 11-15).

# **ARTICLE VI: GENERAL ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The local church body is composed of one body with many members all of whom are in vital relationship with Jesus Christ, but the body also has "joints of supply," units of control, and unity, i.e., church leaders (Eph. 4:16). This together suggests body participation under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ with leadership direction, submission and a authority in a two-directional manner.

First, the local government is invested in the body of believers who compose the local body under the headship of Jesus Christ according to the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 18:20; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:16; 5:21; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

Second, executive authority or leadership, however, is invested by the congregation, as authorized by Scripture, in a Board of Elders who lead the church and to whom the congregation is to submit under the headship of Christ. These men have the authority and responsibility to delegate to individuals, committees or other boards (as a Board of Deacons) authority and responsibility to carry out the business or ministry of the church in spiritual and physical (material) matters (Acts 20:28; 15:6; Eph. 4:11-12; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 5:12-13; Heb. 13:7, 17).

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

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

## ARTICLE VII: ELDERS

### A. Qualifications

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

- (1) They must **desire** the office of elder and demonstrate spiritual leadership abilities among the flock.
- (2) They must be **able to teach** and use the Word of God with wisdom and patience.
- (3) They must be **lovers of God**. Men who take God and His Word seriously.
- (4) They must be **able to manage their household** in a biblical manner.
- (5) They must be able to spiritually manage their interpersonal relationships.
- (6) They must be men who are seeking to be controlled by Christ and His Word rather than by worldly and fleshly desires.
- (7) These men shall hold to the doctrinal statement of this Constitution in accord with the statements of Article V, and be supportive of the entire Constitution.

### B. Authority

The ministry of Living Water Bible Fellowship shall be under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ working in and through the Board of Elders. The elders will be the primary decision-making body within the church. However, it is critical that the elders make decisions based on carefully assembled facts, scriptural insight, the individual and corporate leading by the Holy Spirit, and input from the body (Acts 6:5; 15:6, 22; Heb. 13:17; 1 Thess. 5:12-13).

The church is not a democracy or a government where the majority rules. Jesus Christ Himself is the Head and Ruler of the church. However, as seen in Article VI, the Lord Jesus leads and directs through both the body and the elders. Since the Lord Jesus dwells in each member of the body of Christ, as so leads and directs through the body as to needs, desires, and responsibilities for each local body, it is important and necessary for the elders to seek input, information and guidance from the body, especially on practical matters of church life. As a result of these biblical facts, in major decisions of church life, the congregation will vote to show a unified movement toward the direction in question and to show a sense of God's leading. The elders will not move forward with a decision until, or unless, the majority of the body is unified on the matter. The following illustrates the major areas of concern:

- (1) Making major financial decisions (Article XII).
- (2) Adding or removing paid staff members (Article VIII).
- (3) Adding to or removing elders from the Board of Elders (Article VII).
- (4) Carrying out church discipline (Article XI).

NOTE: When a vote is taken, the procedure outlined in Article X, Section F shall be followed.

### C. Duties

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

- (1) Give themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- (2) Guard and protect the flock.
- (3) Oversee and provide spiritual direction for the activities and growth of the flock.
- (4) Aid in finding and developing gifted teachers of the Word (2 Tim. 2:2).
- (5) Warn and discipline as outlined in Article XI.
- (6) Support, encourage, counsel and lead in humility.
- (7) See to the appointment of deacons as per Article IX.
- (8) Provide guidance to the deacons as needed.
- (9) See to the oversight of the finances of the flock per Article XII.
- (10) Pray for and encourage the sick.
- (11) Seek the Lord's will to interpret the Articles and provisions of this Constitution in the light of Scripture.
- (12) Make decisions and perform any other duties as situations within the church dictate, either directly or through proper and orderly delegation of committees or persons as necessary.

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

#### **D. Appointment (General Principles)**

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

The need for an additional elder, paid or non-paid, may be recognized by either the elders or other members of the church body. The elders, in consultation with or in response to the request of body members, shall seek to discern the nature of the need and to follow God's leading in deciding if the need justifies the appointment of an elder. Upon a decision by the Board of Elders that a need does exist, the church will prayerfully and carefully seek God's direction in choosing the right man or men.

It is the purpose of Living Water Bible Fellowship to base the selection process upon an orderly, proper sequence of events which will most easily facilitate the recognition of God's appointment of men to this ministry. The whole flock should be on the alert for men whose lives characterize the qualifications laid out in Scripture. Only qualified men will be appointed. If no qualified men are available, or if men are unwilling to serve, who would otherwise be qualified, no appointment will be made. The church should wait on the Lord either to remove the need or to provide qualified men.

The Scriptures speak of two categories of elders within a church body: non-paid elders and paid elders (1 Tim. 5:17-18). The following procedures outline the steps necessary to appoint elders:

#### **E. Appointment of Non-Paid Elders**

When the need arises for a new non-paid elder (either for a new position or to replace an elder who has left the Board), the existing Board of Elders should assume a guiding and directing role in the search for the right man. The specific nature of the need and the decision to seek a new elder should be announced to the flock. The flock will be asked to suggest qualified men for the position based on the biblical criteria for elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9; Acts 14:23; 6:1ff).

After a period of time and prayerful consideration, the elders will meet to consider all the nominees as to their qualifications for the position. If the Board believes a man to be qualified, after they have considered the man's qualifications, a member of the Board will be appointed to approach each nominee to explain the specific nature of the need and to determine his willingness to serve (1 Tim. 5:22).

If the elder nominee(s) signifies his understanding of the specific nature of the need and his willingness to serve, the board will announce this to the flock. A time and place will be announced for conducting a vote by the flock to insure substantial agreement among the flock and of God's selection of the nominee(s) (Acts 20:18). The vote will be conducted as outlined in Article X, Section F.

After the above steps are successfully completed, the appointment of the man as a non-paid elder will be announced to the flock. The new elder will be ordained by the Board of Elders.

#### **F. Tenure**

Elders shall be appointed to a term of two (2) years; their terms of office being so arranged that 1/3 of their members' terms shall end each year. The elder board should consist of a minimum of three appointed elders, with the overriding consideration being availability of qualified men and consistent with their continued desire and ability to serve in this capacity; if no qualified men are available, or if men are unwilling to serve, who would otherwise be qualified, no appointment will be made. Thus, it is possible that the board may be comprised of less than the desired minimum. It is also possible that an elder may be re-appointed to a successive term; this must be evaluated and recognized by themselves, by the other elders, and by the church body (Rom. 12:3-8). The removal of elders from office shall be effected by personal resignation or by disciplinary actions in accordance with the following:

#### **G. Voluntary Resignation**

An elder may step down at any time he so chooses. The Elder should prayerfully reflect on his decision and seek counsel from the Board before making a final decision.

#### **H. Involuntary Dismissal**

Involuntary dismissal of any elder, paid or non-paid, will be a disciplinary action of the church body in accordance with the instruction of 1 Timothy 5:19-20; Galatians 6:1 and Matthew 18:15-18. The specific procedures for this are spelling out in Article XI with the following differences:

(1) If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, or believes he has been unfairly treated, then it is to be brought before the congregation to hear

the issues and to allow the person concerned to present his case. It will then be decided by a simple majority vote of the body at a congregational meeting. The body must be informed of such meeting at least two weeks prior to the time of the meeting.

(2) If members of the body believe they are not being properly and biblically represented by the Board or any member of the Board, they are to follow the procedures of Matthew 18:15-16 and first discuss the issues with the Board of Elders. If, after following the above procedures, the issue is not resolved, then they have the right and may call for a congregational meeting (Matt. 18:17) where the issues may be presented and ruled on by a simple majority vote of the congregation. Again, a two-week announcement period will be necessary before the meeting can be held. The congregation, at such time, may remove any or all members of the Board.

## **ARTICLE VIII: PAID ELDERS AND STAFF**

### **A. Paid Elder(s): Pastor-Teacher**

The paid elder(s) plays a critical role in the growth, maturity, spirituality and effectiveness of the church. He is responsible for the quality and content of the teaching and counseling within the flock (Eph. 4:11-16; 1 Tim. 4:6-16). Living Water Bible Fellowship recognizes that the Lord has given spiritual gifts to all believers and therefore does not expect the paid elder(s) to provide all the teaching, evangelism and counseling, etc., within the body (Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11). Rather they are to equip the saints “for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

### **B. Paid Elder(s): Duties, Qualifications and Authority**

The duties, qualifications and authority of the paid elder(s) shall be the same as for non-paid elders (Article VII), with the following additional duties:

- (1) Provide the majority of the teaching during worship services (1 Tim. 4:13).
- (2) Provide guidance, as needed, to the Board of Elders concerning church business and spiritual concerns within the body.
- (3) The senior paid elder shall supervise the paid church staff (secretaries, assistant pastors, youth pastors, etc.).
- (4) Coordinate the administration of the ordinances (baptism and the Lord’s supper).

### **C. Paid Elder(s): Selection**

Upon recognition of the need for a new senior paid elder, the Board of Elders will guide and direct the selection process. The attitude of the Board should be one of submission to the Lord, waiting on Him to fill the need with the right man. They should also be expectant, knowing that God will provide a person to fill the need.

The following procedure outlines the method Living Water Bible Fellowship will follow in selecting a new senior paid elder:

- (1) The selection committee shall be appointed with a member of the Board of Elders as the head of the committee. The committee shall consist of non-paid elders, along with at least an equal number of members of the flock as chosen by the elders.
- (2) The committee shall seek the names and resumes from any qualified and interested men by any means at their disposal. This may include contacting doctrinally sound seminaries to assist in finding qualified men for the position and seeking information from the congregation about possible candidates.
- (3) The committee will carefully and prayerfully consider any resumes submitted. The resumes will be evaluated in light of the man’s experience, interests, doctrinal beliefs, philosophy of the ministry and in light of the needs of the flock.
- (4) The committee will contact one or more men who appear to fill the needs of the church based on the resumes and other gathered information. The men may be invited to visit the church one or more times. These visit(s) should include time for the committee and flock to evaluate the man and his family, time for him to present the Word and time for him to evaluate the church and the community. Attendance of a man’s family is not required on the first visit.
- (5) After each visit, the committee will prayerfully consider the candidate. During the process, they will seek input from the flock concerning the individual by means of written questionnaire. All questionnaires will be reviewed by the committee. After evaluation of the candidate(s), the committee will announce their recommendation to the flock.
- (6) A congregational meeting will be called to vote to see if there is unified agreement with the committee’s recommendation. The meeting date should be at least two (2) weeks after the committee’s recommendation is reported to allow the church ample time to prayerfully consider the decision. The vote will be conducted as outlined in Article X, Section F. If at least two-thirds of the voting members agree with the committee’s recommendation, the committee will offer the position to the man.

(7) If the man turns down the offer, or if the flock does not agree with the committee's recommendation, the above procedure will be repeated until a qualified man is hired.

#### **D. Paid Elder(s): Tenure and Removal**

Tenure and removal of a paid elder will follow the same guidelines as outlined in Article VII.

#### **E. Associate Pastoral Staff**

The need for paid associate pastoral staff to assist in meeting the needs of the flock may be recognized by any member of the church body or leadership. Such need must be agreed to by the senior paid elder (in consultation with the Board of Elders) before action is taken. The need for this expenditure should be discussed with the flock.

The procedure for hiring associate pastoral staff members shall be the same as for a senior paid elder. The senior paid elder will automatically head the selection committee for any associate staff.

All paid pastoral staff will look to the senior paid elder for supervision of their duties and for periodic reviews of their performance. A written job description will be prepared for all paid staff members. This description will be prepared by the senior paid elder in consultation with the Board of Elders.

After appropriate consultation with the church leadership, a recommendation by the senior paid elder will be sufficient for modifying the duties or redirecting the efforts of any paid staff member. Removal of any associate pastoral staff member shall follow the same guidelines as outlined in Article VII.

#### **F. Non-Pastoral Staff**

The hiring of baby sitters, janitorial services, secretary, etc., will be planned for and directed by the Board of Elders.

Since the secretary will be working primarily for the senior paid elder, he will make the final decision, in consultation with the Board of Elders, on who will fill the position.

### **ARTICLE IX: DEACONS**

#### **A. Qualifications**

Deacons shall be men who desire to be servants of the local church body, who are able to serve, who meet all the qualifications of Scripture set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-12, and who are conscientiously and wholeheartedly in agreement with the Constitution of this church.

#### **B. Duties**

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

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

Their specific duties will be designated by the elders according to the need of the church and a deacon's particular gifts, capacities and talents.

#### **C. Appointment**

Deacons shall be appointed to serve as long as they are qualified and willing to serve and as long as a need for their ministry exists.

First Timothy 3:10 teaches that potential deacons are to be tested. The primary means of testing is time; time for the flock to evaluate a man's commitment to the Lord, his qualifications according to 1 Timothy 3:8-12, his doctrinal understanding and his willingness to serve the local body. The flock and the Board of Elders should be on the alert to those men who demonstrate the qualifications of a deacon.

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

The following outlines the procedure Living Water Bible Fellowship will follow in selecting deacons:

- (1) The Board of Elders shall decide if the need for a deacon(s) exists.
- (2) When there is a need, then the Board shall notify the congregation of the need and ask them to recommend to the Board those men whom they believe meet the qualifications.

- (3) The Board of Elders will review the names submitted to them along with any additional names of men they believe to be qualified.
- (4) Each name submitted will be carefully and prayerfully considered and reviewed according to their qualifications, gifts, the need, and the individual's willingness to serve.
- (5) The elders will then appoint that man (men) whom they believe to be the most qualified to serve according to the specific needs and the qualifications.

## **D. Removal of Deacons**

### **1. Voluntary**

A deacon may voluntarily step down from his position at any time he so chooses. The deacon should prayerfully reflect on his decision and seek counsel from the Board of Elders before making a final decision.

### **2. Involuntary Dismissal**

Involuntary dismissal of a deacon shall be in accord with the procedures for church discipline outlined in Article XI. If the situation is such that it necessitates dismissal from office, the Board may suggest voluntary resignation by the person involved. If he refuses, the Board may remove him from office, but only after the principles for church discipline have been prayerfully considered and followed (Matt. 18:15-18).

## **ARTICLE X: CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

### **A. Union in the Universal Body of Christ**

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

### **B. Union With a Local Assembly of Believers**

There is another aspect of this fellowship into which the believer is joined. He is brought into the fellowship of fellow members of that body, other living believers on earth, that he might share and participate in the various blessings and ministries of the body of Christ. For this to occur properly, believers are to seek the fellowship of one another in a local body or assembly of believers to which they are to become responsible, a mini-flock, so to speak, of the greater and universal flock of God (1 Pet. 5:2-3; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1).

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

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

### **C. Church Membership**

The Scriptures contain neither a mandate for nor a command against an official membership roll. In Acts, we see that believers were added to the church in Jerusalem, however, this serves primarily to show the growth in the early church (Acts 2:47; 9:31; 16:5). These people were devoting themselves to a local assembly and its leadership for teaching, leadership, fellowship and worship (Acts 2:42). There were also letters of commendation or acceptance written on behalf of both men and women to be welcomed and accepted into the fellowship of various assemblies. These letters commended believers to other assemblies regarding their faithfulness and ministry and thus they were not a transfer of membership by letter (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 16:10; Col. 4:10; 2 Cor. 3:1; 8:16-24).

The emphasis of these Scriptures is that every believer become identified and committed to a specific local assembly of believers following the leading and direction of God. This commitment is revealed by their attitude, faith, attendance, involvement, giving and submission to that assembly. Thus a membership roll cannot, in and of itself, serve as the sole means of commitment a believer has to a local body.

Living Water Bible Fellowship does have a membership roll to aid in conducting business in an orderly manner and to provide legal protection in important, yet potentially controversial church decisions (such as discipline, Article XI). An individual's decision to be placed on the membership roll should flow from their commitment to the church. The individual should remember that being on the membership role has no merit or value so far as his spiritual maturity or growth is concerned. It is, however, an important tool in helping the church function smoothly.

## **D. Procedure for Membership**

Any individual who confesses the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior and who is in agreement with this Constitution is qualified and eligible for membership in Living Water Bible Fellowship. The church will not solicit anyone to become a member and thus will respect the privacy and personal initiative of the individual in this matter. Anyone who desires to become a member should contact one of the elders and request membership. The board of Elders will meet with the individual to discuss this decision. If the individual meets the qualifications for membership, an announcement either from the pulpit or in the bulletin (at the applicant's preference) shall be made for two consecutive Sundays to give opportunity for member concerns to be addressed to the elder board. After such announcement, barring unresolved concerns made known to the elder board, he/she will be placed on the roll and will be acknowledged before the flock as a new member.

## **E. Membership Roll**

The elders will review the membership roll at least annually. Members may be removed from the roll by the member's choice, by church discipline (Article XI), or by noninvolvement with the body. If an individual appears to no longer be involved with the church, an elder(s) will meet with the person to verify their membership status. No individual will be removed from the roll without being contacted by an elder.

## **F. Voting and Congregational Meetings**

The purpose of voting is not to simply obtain a "majority-rules" consensus. Rather, all voting in this church is designed to show God's leading within the flock on an issue. Unless specifically indicated differently within the Constitution, a two-thirds, majority vote in favor of an issue shall signify to the church leadership that the flock agrees that God is leading favorably in the decision being voted on. If the two-thirds majority vote in favor is not achieved, the leadership will reevaluate the situation. No steps will be taken on any issue that requires a vote without the two-thirds majority.

Any member of the church 18 years or older may vote. The person may vote in person or they may vote absentee. An absentee vote is valid if the person writes down on any piece of paper the issue being voted on, their vote, and their signature. Absentee votes must be turned in to an elder no later than the date of the meeting.

The means of voting will normally be by written ballot. This may vary, however, if the leadership announces the form of voting to be used when the meeting of the vote is announced. The flock will be advised of the date and time of a meeting for a vote at least two weeks prior to the meeting. Those members in attendance at a duly called business meeting shall constitute a quorum.

# **ARTICLE XI: CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE**

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

## **A. The Pattern and Basis for Discipline**

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

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

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

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

## **B. The Purposes of Church Discipline**

- (1) Concern for the glory of God and the testimony of the flock.
- (2) The restoration and building up of the sinning believer.
- (3) The winning of a soul to Christ (if only a professing Christian).

- (4) The purity of the local body and its protection from moral and doctrinally impure influences, knowing a little leaven can leaven the entire lump (1 Cor. 5:6-7).

Such goals automatically govern the spirit in which all disciplinary action is to be given. Thus:

- (1) It must be done in the spirit of humility, gentleness and patience, looking to yourself lest you too be tempted (Gal. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:24-25).
- (2) Those who walk disorderly are to be admonished, warned, and appealed to in love (1 Thess 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 5:1-2; Eph. 4:15; 2 Tim. 4:2). This admonishing, etc., is not restricted to the leaders but may be done by any member (1 Thess. 5:14).
- (3) If there is no response in repentance and obedience, then members are to withhold intimate fellowship until there is obedience (2 Thess. 3:6, 14). This is to indicate to the offender that his action has caused a rupture in the harmony of the body. Its goal is restoration and the person is still to be counted as a brother (2 Thess. 3:14-15).
- (4) If the person persists after admonition and withdrawal of intimate fellowship, the final step is rejection or excommunication (Titus 3:10; Matt. 18:17b), accompanied by public rebuke before all (1 Tim. 5:20). Examples of church discipline are found in Scripture. The Corinthian believers were to be “gathered together” in order to take action against the offending brother (2 Cor. 2:6). We also find that it was the whole church in Rome and in Thessalonica who were to take action with regard to the unruly and schismatic and not just a few (2 Thess. 3:6-15; Rom. 16:17).
- (5) Finally, discipline in the name of our Lord always includes a readiness to forgive. The many or majority who discipline must also be ready and eager to forgive, comfort, and reaffirm their love to the sinning person (2 Cor. 2:6-8).

## **C. The Practice of Church Discipline**

### **1. When it is to be Practiced**

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

- a. Difficulties between members (Matt. 18:15-17).
- b. Divisiveness. People causing divisions in the church (Rom. 16:17-18; Titus 3:9-11).
- c. Disorderly conduct. Conduct clearly out of line with the prescribed commands of Scripture (2 Thess. 3:6-15).
- d. Sins of the type mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5: incest, immorality, covetousness, idolatry, abusive speech, drunkenness, and swindling (1 Cor. 5:1, 11).
- e. False teaching. Erroneous teaching and views which concern the fundamentals of the faith, not lesser differences of interpretation (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18; also implied in Rev. 2:14—16; Phil. 3:2-3, 15-19; Rom. 16:17-18).

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

### **2. How it is to be Practiced**

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

- a. Recognize the offense. Caution—one must be sure it is an offense which calls for discipline. Again, the Word is our criterion.
- b. Seek private correction and/or reconciliation with the offender (Matt. 18:15). This is when the problem involves two believers. The one offended or the one who recognizes the offense is to go privately and try to rectify the problem. If this fails, he is to take witnesses, preferably spiritual leaders, so that if it has to be brought before the whole church it can be firmly proven or established (Matt. 18:16-17).
- c. Seek reconciliation through the spiritual leadership if the problem involves an offense that is against the whole body, or is a threat to its unity. Initiatory action following the concept of Galatians 6:1 should be taken by the mature spiritual leaders of the church rather than by just one person. “You who are spiritual” in Galatians 6:1 is plural meaning literally, “you, the spiritual ones ...” These initial contacts provide opportunity for loving admonition, correction and forgiveness. On the other hand, if these first steps are not heeded, it constitutes a warning that further action will be taken and gives occasion for serious rebuke (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Thess. 5:12-14; Titus 2:15; 3:10).
- d. Seek reconciliation through the whole body. If further action is necessary, it is to be taken before the whole church (Matt. 18:17). This action would consist of a minimum of loss of voting privileges, but may result in more severe action. Any action taken must be approved by a congregational vote as outlined in Article X, Section F.

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

## **ARTICLE XII: FINANCES**

Believers are to give financially from an attitude of commitment to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:1-6). It is the policy of Living Water Bible Fellowship to keep the congregation informed of financial needs by means of the weekly bulletin, announcements from the pulpit, or other means as necessary. This will not include individual solicitation of members to taking of financial pledges. The purpose of this information is not to coerce or pressure anyone into giving, but rather to provide avenues for giving as the Lord provides. Each believer is to give according to their ability with a cheerful heart (2 Cor. 9:7).

This body does not believe that the New Testament believer is required to tithe as was the Old Testament Jew. The tithe, which the Old Testament Law commanded, required that each Jew give a certain percentage of his income to the Lord. However, the Jews could give gifts above and beyond their tithe. The required tithe served more as a “tax” than a gift. Scripture records no such required tithe for believers in the church age. Each believer is to give as God provides from an attitude of cheerfulness and commitment to the Lord (2 Cor. 8:12-15; 9:7), recognizing that we are only stewards of what God already owns.

Though there is no required tithe for believers in the church age recorded in Scripture, it is clear from Scripture that the principle of a tithe as a basis for giving to the Lord is taught apart from the Mosaic Law (Gen. 14:20; 28:22; Heb. 7:2,4). As such, the principle of a tithe is understood as a baseline or starting point for giving as an act of obedience (Deut. 14:22-29; Hag. 1:1-11; Mal. 2:7-12; Rom. 12:13; Gal. 2:10; Heb. 13:16; 1Jn. 3:17), stewardship, worship (Heb. 9:1-10; 10:1-25; 13:10-16), and brotherly love (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35; 11:27-30; 2Cor. 8:1-5; Phil. 4:14-19).

Because giving is done unto the Lord, it is critical that the local church handle the finances given with care and wisdom both for the glory of the Lord and for the testimony of the church (2 Cor. 8:20-21). With this view in mind, the following outlines the policies of handling financial decisions:

- (1) All paid staff shall be paid a salary commensurate to their duties and abilities (1 Timothy 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6-7; 1 Corinthians 9:6-11).
- (2) All gifts given as a designated gift will be used as designated so long as those designations are in accord with biblical principles. If any special gifts are given with the directions to use it in whatever area has the greatest need, the board of Elders will decide how that gift will be used. All other gifts will go into the general fund.
- (3) The local church has the privilege and responsibility to provide financial support for those in service for the Lord (missionaries, seminary students, etc. [Phil. 4:14-17; 2 Cor. 8:1-5]). Living Water Bible Fellowship will support certain of those in service as the Lord leads and provides. All of these supported must hold a doctrinal view in agreement with the doctrinal statement presented in this Constitution. The Board of Elders will recommend to the congregation which people and ministries Living Water Bible Fellowship will support.
- (4) Depending on the amount of money involved, the senior paid elder may make a financial decision by himself, or the Board of Elders may make the decision, or the congregation must make the decision.
- (5) On an annual basis, during the first quarter of the year, a finance committee will be appointed to examine the salaries of all paid salary members, the amount of support given to the persons and ministries supported in number 3 above, and the expenditure limits for the paid elder(s) and Board of Elders. This committee shall consist of at least two elders and the church treasurer. All recommendations concerning changes in these areas will first be presented to the Board of Elders. The elders will present the recommendations to the congregation for approval by a vote as outlined in Article X, Section F. The final decisions made per this procedure will be recorded in the written minutes of the next elders’ meeting following the meeting with the congregation.
- (6) In order to keep orderly records, a treasurer shall be appointed by the Board of Elders. The treasurer shall keep all necessary books, write necessary checks to pay bills, prepare monthly financial statements and any other duties as prescribed by the Board of Elders.

## **ARTICLE XIII: GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES**

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

Following the principles outlined above, any member of the flock who harbors a disagreement about any policy or procedure promoted by the church or its leadership, should as a first step, prayerfully and privately approach the leadership. This may be done through informal consultation with an elder, by means of a signed letter to the Board, or meeting with the Board at the church member’s request. It is recognized that these steps should be taken prior to public discussion of any issue so as to help the leadership minister to the body more effectively and to help avoid discord and disunity within the flock (Prov. 13:3; 16:27-28; 17:4).

The church leadership should seek to prayerfully accept and address any complaint thus presented and seek to resolve all problems in a manner which best promotes those benefits mentioned above (Prov. 16:21-24).

When these policies are not followed, causing factions and strife, it will be necessary to exercise church discipline to deal with the offending member as per Article XI (Titus 2:10-11).

#### **ARTICLE XIV: AMENDMENTS**

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

#### **ARTICLE XV: DISSOLUTION OF PROPERTY**

In case of a division of the church (from which we pray God, by His mercy, will preserve us) the property of the church will belong to those who abide by its Constitution and Bylaws. If the opposing group(s) or division(s) cannot bring resolution to the divisive issue(s), the Central District of the Evangelical Free Church of America will act as arbitrator to make final determination which group retains the rights to the property of the church.

In the event this church body is dissolved, disbands or ceases to function as a church for any reason, the title to all property both real and personal shall pass to and be vested in the Central District of the Evangelical Free Church of America. In such an event, after the payment of all debts of the church, the remaining assets may be managed or disposed of to the best interest of the Central District of the Evangelical Free Church of America.

The church will be considered dissolved if so decided by a two-thirds majority vote of the membership by means of the procedure outlined in Article X, Section F. or when the church has not held an annual meeting for three consecutive years.