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# Church Constitution

## **Preamble**

Since it pleased Almighty God, by His Holy Spirit, to call his servants to unite in 1885 under the name First German Baptist Church in Madison, SD for the worship of God and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and as he has sustained and prospered this work to the present day; we therefore, the members of West Center Baptist Church, do now hereby organize ourselves and adopt this Constitution as our articles of governance. The church is a non-profit corporation organized exclusively for religious, charitable, and educational purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Revenue law).

## **Article I – Mission**

The mission of West Center Baptist Church is to build healthy Christian disciples through the word of God, by the power of the Spirit, among all peoples, for the glory of God.

## **Article II – Church Covenant**

*Having been brought by divine grace to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to follow him, and having been baptized upon our profession of faith, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we the members of West Center Baptist Church, do now, relying on his gracious aid, solemnly and joyfully renew our covenant with each other.*

*We will work and pray to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We will walk together in brotherly love, and exercise an affectionate care and watchfulness over each other, faithfully admonishing and encouraging each other as fits the occasion.*

*We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, nor neglect to pray for each other.*

*We will strive to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and seek the salvation of our family, friends, and neighbors through faithful gospel witness in word and deed.*

*We will rejoice in each other's happiness, grieve in each other's sorrows, and faithfully bear one another's burdens.*

*We will seek, by God's grace, to live upright and holy lives in the world, showing respect to God-given authorities.*

*We will work together for the continuance of faithful gospel ministry in this church, in worship, ordinances, discipline, doctrine, and evangelism.*

*We will contribute cheerfully and regularly to support the ministry of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel to all nations.*

*We will, when we move from this place, as soon as possible, unite with a faithful gospel church and live with them according to God's word.*

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all. Amen.*

## **Article III – Name**

The name of this church is West Center Baptist Church.

## **Article IV – Church Affiliation**

The government of West Center is entrusted by Christ to its members and is to be led by its elders. Although an independent body of believers, we voluntarily, gladly, and formally associate with the North American Baptist Conference and the Great Plains Association. We also desire partnership and cooperation with other like-minded churches as the Lord gives opportunity.

## **Article V – Statement of Faith**

*We believe that our only comfort in life and in death is that we are not our own, but belong body and soul to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ*

### **Scripture**

We believe the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments to be the word of God, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. They are true, clear, sufficient, necessary and without error in the original writings; the only authority for faith and life. (Psalm 19:7-11; John 17:17; 2 Tim 3:14-16; 2 Pet 1:19-21)

### **God**

We believe there is one true and living God, creator of heaven and earth. United in the godhead are three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. They are of the same substance, equal in power and glory, distinct in their persons. God created all things good and now sustains them in his providence by the word of his power; such that all things come not by chance, but by his fatherly hand. (Gen 1:2-3; Deut 6:4; Matt 3:16-17; Col 1:15-17; Heb 1:3)

### **Man**

We believe God created human beings in his image, male and female. Through the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve, all mankind became guilty and corrupt before God. The penalty for sin is physical and spiritual death. Man's supreme need is to be reconciled to God. That reconciliation is wholly dependent on God's gracious intervention. (Gen 1:26-27, 3:1-8, 9:2; Psa 51:5; Matt 13:41-42; Rom 3:10-18; 5:12-19; Eph 2:1-3; 2 Thess 1:8)

### **Jesus Christ**

We believe Jesus Christ is truly God and truly man, two distinct natures united in one person. According to the promise of the Old Testament, he was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He suffered and died on the cross, was raised from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and will return to judge the living and the dead. (Matt 1:20; John 1:14; 5:39; Acts 10:41-42; Phil 2:6-10; Heb 1:1-3)

### **Salvation**

We believe God is the author and finisher of salvation. It has been accomplished through Jesus Christ, who offered himself as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of his people, atoning for guilt, achieving perfect righteousness, appeasing the wrath of God, and reconciling God and man. The salvation secured by Jesus

Christ is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit, such that they are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The hearts of believers are regenerated by the Spirit, who indwells, sanctifies, and empowers them unto Christ-like living and service. He assures them of final glorification on the last day. (Jonah 2:9; John 3:5, 10:11, 28; Acts 4:12; Rom 3:21-26, 8:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 2:15-21; Phil 2:12-13; Heb 9:14)

### **The Gospel**

We believe the gospel of God is the good news that Jesus Christ died and was raised so that sinners can be saved. The gospel of God's grace is to be proclaimed freely to all people, commanding and inviting them to repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, thereby receiving eternal life. (Matt 11:28; Mark 1:15; John 3:16; Rom 1:16-17; 1 Cor 15:1-8)

### **The Church**

We believe there is one, holy, universal, apostolic church, created by the word of God through the power of the Spirit, under the headship of Christ alone, a communion of saints. The universal church is made visible in local churches. The house and family of God being made up of all those credibly professing faith in Christ. (Acts 2:41-47; Rom 10:14-17; Eph 4:4-5; 5:23-27; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:9; Rev 5:9)

### **The Ordinances**

We believe there are two new covenant ordinances instituted by Christ: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are visible signs pointing to invisible graces, to be received by believers with faith as sanctifying means of grace—a remembrance, an assurance, a testimony to their faith, and an anticipation of Christ's return. (Luke 22:14-20; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 11:17-34; Col 2:11-12)

### **The Christian Hope**

We believe God has appointed a day when Jesus will return to raise bodily the living and the dead—the unjust to eternal conscious punishment in hell, the just to eternal blessedness in God's presence. He will judge each person according to what he has done, and consummate the new creation, a kingdom of righteousness and peace. God will dwell with his people forever. (Matt 25:31-46; Acts 17:31; 24:15; Rom 2:6-11; Rev 21:1-5)

## **Article VI – Membership**

### **Section 1 – Qualifications for Membership**

1. A person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who gives evidence of regeneration, and be baptized by immersion upon profession of faith.
2. The proper mode of administering baptism is immersion. The elders will prayerfully consider cases where it may not be practical for a baptismal candidate to be baptized by immersion.
3. Each member must agree and submit to the teaching of Scripture as expressed in the Statement of Faith.

4. Each member must promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant and the standards of the Constitution. They must complete pre-membership requirements as determined by the elders.
5. The elders shall be responsible for determining whether a person meets the qualifications for membership. In part, this shall be done through a membership interview conducted to evaluate a person's profession of faith, understanding of the gospel, and evidence of regeneration.

## Section 2 – Admission of Members

1. To be received into membership, a person shall be accepted by a vote of the elders at any regular or special meeting of the elders. The individual shall at that point relinquish their membership in any other church.
2. A member may be received by: (1) A credible profession of faith and baptism upon profession; (2) A letter of transfer from a church of like faith and practice; (3) Restoration if disciplined at a church of like faith and practice, as determined by the elders.
  - a. If a transfer request occurs while the member is in the process of church discipline or is not in good standing at another church, the elders may reject the request. In such a case, the elders should seek to discuss the matter with the requesting church.

## Section 3 – Privileges and Responsibilities

1. In accordance with the Church Covenant, each member is expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, deploying the gifts, time, and resources given by the Holy Spirit. Only members shall be permitted to serve in the ministries of the church; non-members may be permitted upon the approval of the elders.
  - a. All contributions made to funds established by the church to further its mission shall be considered advisory and remain subject to the control and discretion of the elders.
2. It is the privilege and responsibility of the members to attend regularly scheduled and special member meetings and vote on the election of officers, decisions related to membership status, the annual budget, church property, and any other matter submitted to the congregation for a vote.
  - a. Membership does not provide any contract, property, or civil legal rights in the property of the church.

## Section 4 – Church Discipline

Church discipline is the exercise of authority given to the church by Christ to instruct, guide and promote its purity and welfare among members according to the word of God. Church discipline can include admonition by the elders or congregation, suspension from communion for a definite period, removal from church office, and excommunication.

1. Purpose
  - a. The repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined (Prov 15:5; 1 Cor 4:14; Heb 12:1–11; Matt 18: 15–17; Luke 17: 3; 1 Cor 5:5; Gal 6:1–5; 1 Tim 1:20; Titus 1:13–14; James 1:22).

- b. Instruction in righteousness and a witness to other Christians (Prov 13:20; Rom 15:14; 1 Cor 5:11; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:14; 1 Tim 5:20; Titus 1:11).
- c. The purity and unity of the church as a whole (1 Cor 5:6-7; 2 Cor 13:10; Eph 5:27; 2 John 10; Jude 24; Rev 21:2).
- d. The good of our corporate witness to the world (Prov 28:7; Matt 5:13-16; John 13:35; Acts 5:1-14; Eph 5:11; 1 Tim 3:7; 2 Peter 2:2; 1 John 3:10).
- e. Most supremely for the glory of God by reflecting his character (Deut 5:11; 1 Kings 11:2; 2 Chron 19:2; Ezra 6:21; Neh 9:2; Isaiah 52:11; Ezek 36:20; Matt 5:16; John 15:8; Rom 2:24; 15:5-6; Eph 1:4, 5:27; 1 Peter 2:12).

## 2. Process

- a. The process of *informal* church discipline begins with one member admonishing another regarding sin, including the denial of our Statement of Faith. Every member is responsible to encourage and admonish others toward godliness, truth, and unity; to speak the truth in love as fits the occasion.
- b. The process of *formal* church discipline begins when a member fails to repent after the pleas of at least two other members. It may also begin with an offense of a public or scandalous nature. This process may culminate in the exclusion of the member from the church.
  - i. In all formal cases, the responsibility for administering church discipline rests with the elders; the responsibility to exclude a member rests with the congregation (Matt 18:17; 1 Cor 4:4-5; 2 Cor 2:6).
    - 1. Following a biblical process led by the elders, a two-thirds vote of the congregation at any congregational meeting is required to exclude a member. Upon exclusion, the individual shall be treated with love as an unbeliever.
    - 2. An excluded member, whose actions or presence is stirring up discord and strife in the church, is to be kept away from all church gatherings (Tit 3:10-11).
- c. Private Offense: Offenses between members should be dealt with according to the principles of Matthew 18:15-20 and Galatians 6:1. No formal process will begin until these steps have been pursued and the elders have become involved.
  - i. Once involved, the elders may require any charges to be submitted in writing.
- d. Public Offense: Offenses of a public and/or scandalous nature should be dealt with according to the principles of 1 Corinthians 5, to protect the honor of Christ and the purity and unity of his church.
  - i. A member may be excluded from membership for a public offense during the same congregational meeting the charge is presented.
- e. Restoration: All effort shall be made to restore an excluded member. Upon confession of sin and satisfactory evidence of true repentance, he or she may be restored to membership (2 Cor 2:6-8).
  - i. Restoration must include, (a) an interview with two or more elders; (b) a recommendation of restoration by the elders to the congregation; (c) a two-thirds vote by the membership at any congregational meeting.

### 3. Appeal

- a. If a member has a complaint against an elder, deacon, or another member in the process of church discipline, they are entitled to a biblical appeals process. That appeal must involve one or more of the following areas:
  - i. A member believes Scripture has been wrongly applied.
  - ii. A member believes the facts of the case have not been appropriately considered (e.g. lack of evidence).
  - iii. A member believes the constitutional process has not been correctly followed.
  - iv. A member believes a conflict of interest has occurred.
- b. For the appeals process, see *West Center's Formal Appeals Process Policy*.

## Section 5 – Termination of Membership

Membership at West Center may be terminated in the following ways:

### 1. Erasure

- a. Any member who has not participated in the life of the church in any meaningful way for a one-year period, that West Center has no ability to contact, may be removed from membership.
- b. Any member who has not participated in the life of the church in any meaningful way for a one-year period, except in cases of illness, infirmity, or an absence of a clearly temporary nature, whose location and current situation is known to West Center, may be removed from membership thirty days after written notification is mailed to the member. During that period, the member may request cancellation of the removal based on his or her renewed commitment to the church.
- c. The membership of an individual will automatically terminate upon his or her death.
- d. The name of any member who has become a member of a church of like-minded faith and practice will be removed from membership.

### 2. Exclusion

- a. Following a process of biblical church discipline (see Article V, Section 4.2) and a two-thirds vote by the congregation, a member may be excluded from membership.

### 3. Withdrawal

- a. A member may request to withdraw his or her membership from West Center at any time. The request may be made verbally or in writing. The elders must vote to approve the request for withdrawal.
- b. If a member requests withdrawal while not in good standing for any biblical reason, or in the process of church discipline, the elders may deem them to be excommunicating themselves from the church. The congregation shall be formally notified in such an instance.
- c. Members who withdraw their membership will be encouraged to join, as soon as possible, another faithful gospel church.

## **Article VII – Meetings**

### Section 1 – Worship Meetings

Public worship services shall be held each Lord's Day (Sunday), and may be held at other times throughout the week as the church determines.

### Section 2 – Member Meetings

In every meeting, members shall act in a spirit of love, respect, reasonableness, and mutual trust as is fitting for the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### 1. Annual Meeting

- a. An annual member meeting will be held in either November or December, as determined by the elders. A minimum of two prior consecutive Sunday worship services notice to the congregation is required.
- b. The budget for the upcoming fiscal year, having been examined and approved by the elders in consultation with the deacons, will be presented for congregational approval.
  - i. The elders may spend up to 5% beyond the gross budget of the current fiscal year toward ministry priorities, as seems good before the Lord.

#### 2. Special Meetings

- a. Special member meetings may be called by the elders at any time. Unless the meeting is of an emergency nature, a minimum of two prior consecutive Sunday worship services notice is required.
- b. The congregation may call a special member meeting by submitting a written request to the elders which includes a minimum of five percent of the voting membership. The elders will have one month from receiving the request to schedule the special meeting.

#### 3. Voting

- a. A quorum shall consist of twenty percent of the voting membership (active) as determined by the elders at their first meeting of the calendar year.
- b. A minimum two-thirds majority is required on all votes. The Constitution or the elders may otherwise specify a higher percentage majority as seems good before the Lord.
- c. Members must be eighteen years old to vote on any matter in the church.
- d. Member meetings shall be typically open to non-members, who may observe without participating or voting. The elders may determine a meeting (or portion of a meeting) to be appropriate for members only.

#### 4. Rules of Order

- a. An elder designated by the elders shall preside as moderator at all member meetings of the church.
- b. The moderator shall determine the rules of procedure according to his sense of fairness and common sense, giving all members a reasonable opportunity to be heard on a matter. The moderator is

the final authority on questions of procedure, and his decision is final and binding.

## **Article VIII – Church Policy**

Policies and procedures beyond the scope of the Constitution are to be written and voted on by the elders. Once approved, these policies shall be officially recorded and made available to church members.

## **Article IX – Offices**

The biblical offices prescribed in the New Testament are elder and deacon. These offices are equal in value, different in function.

### Section 1 – Elders

The office of elder shall be composed of as many men who are biblically qualified, willing, recognized by the congregation, and is fitting for the shepherding needs of the congregation. These men shall be received as a gift of Christ to his church and set apart as elders. If possible, a majority of the elders shall be men not employed by the church. All staff pastors called by the church will serve as elders.

#### 1. Qualifications

- a. An elder must meet and maintain the character and gifting qualifications as defined by 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-4.
- b. Elders are to be men of wisdom and experience who have already been serving faithfully in the church in prayer and the ministry of the word.
- c. Elders must wholeheartedly believe the West Center Statement of Faith and the Elder Confession of Faith.
- d. An elder must come to the office with a heart of humility and submission to his fellow elders, seeking to be of one mind with them as his conscience permits (Phil 1:27).
- e. An elder candidate must be a member at West Center for at least two years prior to his nomination.

#### 2. Responsibilities

- a. The elders are responsible for the teaching and governing of the church. That is, they know, lead, feed and protect the flock. They are charged to pray for the congregation and minister the word of God. They must guard sound doctrine and the spiritual unity of the church. They must shepherd and care for the body with all gentleness and sincerity, pushing them toward growth in Christ. They will conduct worship services and administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. They will equip the saints for the work of ministry and oversee and evaluate the church's ministries. They will oversee the church's finances and property. They are responsible for examining and instructing prospective members. They are to serve as examples to the flock in Christian living. They must provide leadership in matters of church discipline and mobilize the church toward world missions.

- b. The elders may establish ministry positions or teams to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities.
- c. Each ministry of the church shall have at least one elder giving oversight to its work and direction (e.g. missions; children's ministry; worship).
- d. The elders shall meet regularly to study God's word, pray for the congregation and one another, foster each other's spiritual growth, and seek God's will and wisdom for matters in the church.

### 3. Election

The election process should be conducted in a spirit of mutual trust, grace, kindness, and loving respect that is fitting for the body of Christ.

- a. The elders are responsible for nominating, interviewing, training, and recommending men of the church as called and qualified for eldership. This process is to be led by staff pastors, as follows:
  - i. After privately assessing a man's call to eldership and believing him called by Christ, the elders will publicly nominate the candidate(s).
  - ii. The elders will then interview each candidate and his wife (if married) to assess the call.
  - iii. They will also conduct training in theology, shepherding, and character in order to prepare the candidate for his responsibilities.
  - iv. Finally, on a two-thirds majority vote by the elders, a candidate will be presented to the congregation for election.
- b. Any member may recommend a man they believe should be considered for the office of elder by submitting his name to the elders.
- c. The elders will give the congregation at least two months to consider those nominated to the office. They will encourage the church toward prayer, communication with the candidate, and to express any concerns to the elders.
  - i. During this time, the elders will provide at least one opportunity for the church to interact publicly with the candidate(s).
- d. Upon a three-fourths majority congregational vote at any scheduled member meeting, a candidate shall be recognized as an elder.
- e. Once elected, the elders shall schedule a public installation during any regular Sunday Worship service.

### 4. Length of Service

- a. Elders shall serve indefinitely and are not subject to term limits. However, each elder is subject to an informal annual assessment by the elders and the Senior Pastor. He is to assess his fitness to serve (e.g. character, zeal, illness, family) and effectiveness in serving (e.g. gifting, relationship to the body, relationship to other elders, availability). Each elder should humbly lean on the wisdom of his fellow elders and his wife (if married) in this assessment.
- b. Each elder shall be granted a one-year sabbatical from his responsibilities every 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> year of service (staff pastors excepted, see Article X, Section 1.4.b). Return to eldership after a sabbatical is subject to the assessment discussed in 4.a and

agreement by the current elders. An extended sabbatical may be granted because of a legitimate need, subject to the elders' approval.

#### 5. Resignation or Dismissal

- a. An elder's office may be terminated by his resignation, which is to be submitted in writing to the elders.
- b. Charges Against an Elder
  - i. Any two members who believe an elder is disqualified or has failed to properly carry out the responsibilities of his office, should express their concern to the elders. This action should be taken in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5:17-21.
    1. Not all charges are actionable. Charges must be brought by at least two eyewitnesses and must be both observable and definable (i.e. witnessed and clear violations of God's word, Statement of Faith, Church Covenant, or Constitution).
  - ii. The process for considering actionable charges is established by *West Center's Elder Charges Process Policy*.
  - iii. Any charges brought against an elder by a non-member shall have no official standing in the church. The elders may determine it wise to investigate any such charges.
    1. A charge brought by a non-member who is a professing believer and joined to another church must be accompanied by their pastors/elders to ensure oversight and accountability.
  - iv. Members who are found to have made malicious or false charges may be subject to church discipline.
- c. Any elder may be dismissed by a two-thirds vote at any member meeting.

#### 6. Structure of the Eldership

- a. The eldership must be composed of a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 4:14).
- b. The elders must annually elect a Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Treasurer as legal officers in accord with South Dakota non-profit corporation law. They shall have authority to sign documents on behalf of the congregation, as directed. These officers shall not be staff pastors.
- c. The responsibility of moderating and taking minutes at elder meetings shall be shared among all the elders.
  - i. Once approved, minutes will be made available to church members.
- d. The elders will decide on the general rules for conducting elder meetings, according to common sense and biblical principles. The moderator is the final authority on questions of procedure.
- e. A majority of the elders shall constitute a quorum for an elder meeting.
- f. Conflict within the elders
  - i. In the event of significant conflict within the elders that cannot be resolved by the elders and has become harmful to the church (e.g. they are unable to care for the body, has become

divisive), appeal shall initially be made to mature and godly members of WCB for conflict mediation.

- ii. If the conflict is not resolved through member mediation, appeal shall be made to outside conciliators. This can include but is not limited to: NAB pastors and personnel, pastors and elders of like-minded churches, like-minded outside organizations (e.g. Peacemaker Ministries; the Institute for Christian Conciliation).

## Section 2 – Deacons & Deaconesses

The office of deacon shall be composed of as many men and women who are biblically qualified, willing, recognized by the congregation, and is fitting for the physical and practical needs of the congregation. These men and women shall be received equally as a gift of Christ to his church and set apart as deacons and deaconesses. The office of deacon is an office of service and does not carry teaching or governing authority.

### 1. Qualifications

- a. Deacons must meet and maintain the character qualifications as defined by 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and walk in the unique example provided in Acts 6:1-7 (cf. Rom 12:7-8).
- b. Deacons are to be members who have already shown gifting and faithfulness in a ministry of service, as well as in promoting unity in the church.
- c. Deacons must come to the office with a willingness to submit to the direction of the elders and serve with a heart of humility alongside fellow deacons.
- d. A deacon candidate must be a member at West Center for at least two years prior to their nomination.

### 2. Responsibilities

- a. Deacons are to care for the physical needs of the congregation. This includes church benevolence, church facilities, and church finances. They must have a heart of love and compassion for those in need. They must pursue and strengthen the unity of the body in Spirit-given wisdom. Deacons serve the church by freeing the elders for ministry of the word and prayer.
- b. Each deacon and deaconess are to be appointed by the elders to a specific area(s) of ministry. Deacons may recruit unpaid volunteers to assist them in their work, with special emphasis on encouraging those members with administrative and helping gifts.
- c. The deacons shall meet regularly to conduct business, coordinate their ministry, and promote unity within it. An elder representative may attend deacon meetings to better coordinate ministry in the church.
  - i. Additionally, the deacons shall meet quarterly with the elders.

### 3. Election

- a. The elders are responsible for nominating, interviewing, training, and recommending men and women of the church as qualified for the role of deacon.

- i. After privately assessing an individual's call to the office, and believing them called by Christ, the elders will publicly nominate the candidate(s).
  - ii. The elders will then interview each candidate and their spouse (if married) to assess the call.
  - iii. They will also conduct training in theology, service, and character to prepare the candidate for their responsibilities.
  - iv. Finally, on a two-thirds majority vote by the elders, a candidate will be presented to the congregation for election.
- b. Any member may recommend someone they believe should be considered for the office of deacon by submitting his or her name to the elders.
- c. The elders will give the congregation at least two months to consider those nominated to the office. They will encourage the church toward prayer, communication with the candidate, and to express any concerns to the elders.
  - i. During this time, the elders will provide at least one opportunity for the church to interact publicly with the candidate(s).
- d. Upon a three-fourths majority congregational vote at any scheduled member meeting, he or she shall be recognized as a deacon.

#### 4. Length of Service

- a. Deacons are subject to term limits of three years. A term may be renewed once upon re-nomination by the elders and three-fourths majority congregational vote at any scheduled member meeting. After consecutive three-year terms, a deacon is required to step down for at least twelve months.

#### 5. Resignation or Dismissal

- a. A deacon's office may be terminated by his or her resignation, which is to be submitted in writing to the elders.
- b. Any two members who believe a deacon is disqualified or has failed to properly carry out the responsibilities of the office, should express their concern to the elders. This action should be taken in accordance with Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Tim 3:8-13.

#### 6. Structure of the Diaconate

- a. The responsibility of moderating and taking minutes at deacon meetings shall be shared among all the deacons.
  - i. Once approved, minutes will be made available to church members.
- b. The deacons will decide on the general rules for conducting deacon meetings, according to common sense and biblical principles. The moderator is the final authority on questions of procedure.

## **Article X – Church Staff**

### Section 1 – The Senior Pastor

#### 1. Qualifications

- a. The Senior Pastor must meet and maintain the character and gifting qualifications as defined by 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter

5:1-4. The church must recognize him as particularly called and gifted for preaching and teaching.

- i. As elders, all staff pastors must be male (1 Tim 2:12-13, 3:2; Titus 1:6)
- b. He is expected to have a high-level of biblical, theological, and pastoral ministry training, preferably through a like-minded evangelical institution. He must also carry ordination in good standing from a like-minded church or plan to pursue ordination through West Center.
- c. He must wholeheartedly believe the West Center Statement of Faith and the Elder Confession of Faith. He must also agree with the West Center Constitution and become a member of the church (along with his wife, if married) upon accepting the call.

## 2. Responsibilities

- a. As an elder, the Senior Pastor shall have the responsibilities outlined in Article IX, Section 1.2.
- b. In addition, he shall be the primary preaching pastor during the church's Sunday worship service. He shall have primary responsibility for the spiritual leadership, direction, and teaching of the elders and the congregation.
- c. He shall supervise the church staff and is able to, in consultation with the elders, appoint, hire, and dismiss non-elder staff positions.

## 3. Election

- a. When the Senior Pastor position is vacant, the elders shall appoint a Search Committee to conduct a pastoral search process. This committee shall consist of seven members, two of which shall be elders, along with five church members (male and female). One of the elders will serve as chair of the committee.
- b. If the elders already have a candidate in place, they shall appoint the Search Committee to examine this candidate.
- c. Following the pastoral search process, and a unanimous vote by the Search Committee and the elders, a candidate may be presented publicly to the congregation.
  - i. The elders will give the congregation at least two weeks to consider the candidate. During this time, the elders will encourage the church toward prayer, create opportunities for members to engage with the candidate, and solicit any questions or concerns from the body.
  - ii. During this time, the candidate will be invited to preach during at least one Sunday worship service.
- d. Upon a three-fourths majority vote in favor of the candidate at any scheduled member meeting, he shall be offered the position.

## 4. Length of Service

- a. The Senior Pastor shall be called to serve for an indefinite period of time.
- b. He shall be given a brief sabbatical in his third year of service (and in the third year after a longer sabbatical) and a longer sabbatical in every sixth or seventh year of service, as determined by the elders.
- c. In the absence or incapacity of the Senior Pastor, the elders shall assume responsibility for his duties in the interim. Such duties may be delegated.

## 5. Resignation or Dismissal

- a. Any staff pastor may terminate his office by his resignation, which is to be submitted to the elders in writing.
  - i. The elders may reject the pastor's resignation if it comes while the pastor is under investigation or for any other biblical reason.
- b. Upon a majority vote of the elders (recusing the pastor in question), the elders may recommend dismissal of a pastor to the congregation.
  - i. A special member meeting will be called with two-weeks prior notification, if possible. Upon a two-thirds majority vote of members at that meeting, the pastor will be dismissed.
- c. A staff pastor may also come under church discipline in accordance with Article VI, Section 4, and Article IX, Section 1.5.b.

## Section 2 – Associate Pastors

The senior pastor, in consultation with the elders, may recommend the hiring of Associate Pastors for the benefit of the congregation.

### 1. Qualifications

- a. An Associate Pastor must meet and maintain the character and gifting qualifications as defined by 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-4. While not primarily responsible for the church's preaching ministry, the church must recognize his clear gifting and calling in preaching and teaching.
- b. He is expected to have a high-level of biblical, theological, and pastoral ministry training, preferably through a like-minded evangelical institution. He must also carry ordination in good standing from a like-minded church or plan to pursue ordination through West Center.
- c. He must wholeheartedly believe the West Center Statement of Faith and the Elder Confession of Faith. He must also agree with the West Center Constitution and become a member of the church (along with his wife, if married) upon accepting the call.

### 2. Responsibilities

- a. As an elder, an Associate Pastor shall have all the responsibilities outlined in Article IX, Section 1.2.
- b. He is to support and complement the ministry of the Senior Pastor.

### 3. Election

- a. When an Associate Pastor is needed, the elders shall appoint a Search Committee to conduct a pastoral search process. This committee shall consist of five members, two of which shall be elders, along with three church members (male and female). One of the elders will serve as chair of the committee.
- b. If the elders already have a candidate in place, they shall appoint the Search Committee to examine this candidate.
- c. Following the pastoral search process, and a unanimous vote by the Search Committee and the elders, a candidate may be presented publicly to the congregation.

- i. The elders will give the congregation at least two weeks to consider the candidate. During this time, the elders will encourage the church toward prayer, create opportunities for members to engage with the candidate, and solicit any questions or concerns from the body.
- ii. During this time, the candidate will be invited to preach during at least one Sunday worship service.
- d. Upon a three-fourths majority vote in favor of the candidate at any scheduled member meeting, he shall be offered the position.

#### 4. Length of Service

- a. An Associate Pastor shall be called to serve for an indefinite period of time.
- b. He shall be given a brief sabbatical in his third year of service (and in the third year after a longer sabbatical) and a longer sabbatical in every sixth or seventh year of service, as determined by the elders.

For dismissal or resignation, see Article X, Section 1.5.

### Section 3 – Ministry Staff

The Senior Pastor, in consultation with the elders, may recommend the hiring of ministry staff for the benefit of the congregation.

- 1. Those hired as ministry staff shall not be pastors, though they may be recognized as elders should they be nominated by the elders and elected by the congregation, in accordance with Article IX, Section 1.

## **Article XI – Dispute Resolution**

Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian church (Matt 18:15–20, 1 Cor 6:1–8), members are required to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without reliance on the secular courts. Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles to resolve disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or non-Christian and whether individuals or corporate entities. This does not prohibit the involvement of lawful authorities with regard to criminal activity or matters that jeopardize the safety of any persons.

## **Article XII – Indemnification**

### Section 1 – Mandatory Indemnification

If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the elders determine that the person acted (a) in good faith, (b) with the care an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, and (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, and the person had no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful.

## Section 2 – Permissive Indemnification

At the discretion of the elders, the church also may indemnify any person who acted in good faith and reasonably believed that his or her conduct was in the church's best interest and not unlawful.

## Section 3 – Procedure

If a quorum of the elders is not available for an indemnification determination because of the number of elders seeking indemnification, the requisite determination may be made by the membership or by special legal counsel appointed by the membership.

## **Article XIII – Amendments**

General constitutional amendments may be made at any member meeting with a quorum present and a two-thirds majority vote. Any proposed constitutional amendment must be offered at two consecutive Sunday worship services prior to such a vote.

The Statement of Faith and Church Covenant may be amended at any member meeting with a quorum present and a three-fourths majority vote. Any proposed amendment to the Statement of Faith or Church Covenant must be offered at two consecutive Sunday worship services prior to such a vote.