

## The Constitution of Ephesus Church in Rincon, GA.

### Preamble

*We, the members of Ephesus Church do hereby ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves:*

#### ARTICLE I

##### **Name**

The name of this church shall be Ephesus Church. We identify ourselves as Evangelical, Reformed, and Baptist.

#### ARTICLE II

##### **Affiliation**

**Section 1.** We acknowledge no ecclesiastical authority other than our Lord Jesus Christ, who is head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23) and who directs the affairs of the church through elders chosen and ordained according to the precepts of Holy Scripture. The elders themselves at all times and in all their activities are subject to the authority of Holy Scripture.

**Section 2.** The church may cooperate with other like minded churches in matters of mutual interest and concern. We may seek the assistance and counsel of other churches in matters of special concern to us, but the decision of no other church or group of churches shall at any time be acknowledged as binding on this church.

#### ARTICLE III

##### **Purpose**

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, evangelizing sinners, and edifying saints. Therefore, we are committed to the proclamation of the glorious Gospel of His grace through all the world and to the defense of “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

#### ARTICLE IV

##### **Articles of Faith**

We hereby adopt as a reasonable expression of our faith the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith. This confession of faith gives a concise statement of biblical doctrine. In no way is it equal to the infallible authority of the Word of God. Nevertheless, it is an assistance to us in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. In this confession the members of our church will have a body of Divinity in small compass and by means of scriptural proofs will be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them (1 Peter 3:15).

#### ARTICLE V

## **Membership**

**Requirements for Membership.** Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized upon the profession of his faith, who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines (Article 1V) and aims of this church, and is willing to submit to its government and membership covenant (Appendix 1), may request to be considered for membership.

**Procedures in the Reception of New Members.** A person who desires to become a member of the church must attend the membership “Inquirer’s” class and complete the “Pursuit of Membership” application (Appendix 2). After the candidate for membership completes the membership class and returns the completed application an elder will review the information provided and will then schedule a meeting with the person or persons pursuing membership. During the interview the elder will seek to determine whether the person has a credible profession of faith in Christ, has been scripturally baptized, is in substantial agreement with the doctrines of the church (Article 1V), intends to give whole hearted support to its ministry, submit to its authority, and honor its membership covenant (Appendix 1). The results of all “Pursuit of Membership” interviews will be discussed by the board of elders prior to presenting candidates as members of the church.

Any person who requests membership shall have their request made publicly known to the congregation on the Lord’s Day, in order to provide opportunity for any member to confer with the elders as to the applicant’s qualifications, or lack thereof, for membership. The elders shall take any comments made into consideration when evaluating the qualifications of the prospective applicant for membership. If it is determined in the judgment of the elders that the applicant for membership meets the requirements for membership, he shall be received into membership by public announcement at the conclusion of a Lord’s Day worship service.

**Principles for Denying Membership.** The elders and congregation may deny membership to any person or persons with stated cause. Ephesus Church is answerable to Jesus Christ alone for all of her decisions and actions and therefore is not answerable to any outside secular or ecclesiastical authority.

## **Termination of Membership**

**By Physical death.** When a member of the church is removed from our midst by death, his name shall automatically be removed from the membership roll.

**By transfer.** When it is so requested, the elders may grant to a departing member in good standing a letter of dismissal to the fellowship of another church. No such letter may be given to a member who is at the time under the corrective discipline of this church. The elders may refuse to grant a letter of transfer to any church which is in their judgment disloyal to “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3) or which does not exercise Godly care over its members.

**By exclusion.** If a member habitually absents himself from the stated meetings of the church without showing just cause, or if due to relocation he ceases to maintain a vital contact with the church, he may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the elders. Also, any

member who personally so requests may, after due admonition, be excluded from the membership. In such cases, no congregational approval of the action shall be needed. If an excluded member applies again for membership, the procedures set forth in “Procedures in the Reception of New Members” (Article V) will again be followed.

**By excommunication.** According to the teaching of Holy Scripture a congregation may cut off from its fellowship and visible membership any person who teaches or insists on holding to false and heretical doctrine or who blatantly and persistently conducts himself in a manner inconsistent with his Christian profession, or who persists in disturbing the unity or peace of the church (Matthew 18:15). The procedure to be followed in such excommunication is set forth in the “Church Discipline”(Article V1) section of this Constitution.

## ARTICLE VI

### **Church Discipline**

**Formative Discipline.** Every disciple (follower) of Christ must be under His discipline (His instruction and correction), which is administered to each one through the church, according to 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and other passages. Mutual submission to one another and to the overseers/elders whom the Lord has set over His church (Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 5:5) will result in the sanctification of each member individually and of the whole body of the church collectively. There are occasions, however, when failure in the application of this formative discipline makes the application of corrective discipline necessary.

**Corrective Discipline.** Corrective discipline becomes necessary when heretical doctrine or disorderly or scandalous conduct appears among the members of the church. In all such cases reasonable efforts must be made to resolve difficulty, correct error, and remove offense through counsel and admonition before more drastic steps are taken (Galatians 6:1, James 5:19-20). The principles given to us in Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 must be carefully followed in all cases of corrective discipline. When admonition is not heeded, corrective discipline will be applied. Corrective discipline has for its aim the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church, and the spiritual growth of the offender

**Restoration.** It is the duty of the church to forgive and restore to full membership a disciplined person who gives satisfactory evidence of his repentance and reformation (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). Satisfactory evidence includes a public confession of the sin and an apology to the offended party, as well as the Body of Christ. A sufficient amount of time, to be determined by the elders, may be required in order to determine the genuineness of one’s stated repentance. This time of “observing one’s life” is defined as “Watchcare”.

## ARTICLE VII

### **Baptism and the Lord’s Supper**

**General Statement.** There are two ordinances of special significance, which our Lord has commanded us to observe, namely, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Neither of them has saving merit, nor is any grace imparted to the recipient through the water of Baptism or the bread and the cup of the Supper. These ordinances are intended to be aids to the faith of the believers who

participate in them, not a means of imparting grace through engagement in the physical act of participation.

**Baptism.** Only confessed disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ are proper candidates for Baptism, and all such persons should be baptized. Believing that Baptism is the God-ordained door of entrance into the visible community of the people of God, but not a means or prerequisite of salvation, we shall receive into the membership of the church only those who have been baptized in the biblical manner, which is by immersion. Baptisms by immersion, administered by other evangelical churches, will be received at the discretion of the elders. Other forms of Baptism (sprinkling), due to physical or mental infirmities will be accepted on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the elders.

**The Lord's Supper.** The assembled church should celebrate the Lord's Supper. While this is a most holy ordinance and should be observed with solemnity and dignity, the bread and cup of the Supper are and remain only symbols of the Body and shed Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Membership at Ephesus shall not be a requirement for participating in the Lord's Supper. The only requirement is that the participant be a baptized believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Along with the Lord's Supper we will, at the elder's discretion, observe the example of washing the Saint's feet. This example is a long-standing tradition (not an ordinance) that has been a great blessing to the Christian church. We will therefore honor the keeping of this example, at the elder's discretion, so that we might remember our Lord's command that we serve one another.

## ARTICLE VIII

### **Office Bearers**

**General Statement.** Jesus Christ alone is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18), and He governs His church through office bearers whom He appoints and who are endowed by His Spirit with the gifts and graces needed to accomplish their work. Office bearers in the church are of two kinds, Elders (also called "Bishops") and Deacons (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1-13). It is the duty of the church, under the oversight of existing elders, to seek and discover among its members those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for office bearing, and after formally recognizing such by common consent, to set them apart by united prayer, and then to submit to their authority.

**Elders.** Scriptures indicate that there should be a plurality of elders in the local church (Acts 20:17; Philippians 1:1). These are also called "bishops" (meaning "overseers") because they are charged with the oversight of the assembly (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2). They are the "pastors and teachers" given to the church "for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-12). The primary focus of elders must be prayer and the ministry of the Word as described in Acts 6:1-4.

Elders are also responsible for the spiritual ministration of the church, the implementation of discipline, and the oversight of the souls of the church's members "as they that shall give account" to God (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3). While every elder must be "apt to teach" and does teach in a variety of settings, one elder will be considered

the “preaching pastor”. This provides consistency for the congregation. However, every elder is a pastor and all elders carry the same authority and deserve the same respect. All ministries must be under the direction and oversight of the elders. Elders will delegate among themselves oversight in those ministry areas that best suits their abilities and gifts.

While elders are overseers of the flock, they are themselves members of the flock. Therefore, each elder as an individual is under the oversight of his fellow elders and is subject to the same discipline as are all the members of the church.

The church should endeavor to discover and formally recognize those men whom the Holy Spirit has endowed with the requisite gifts and graces of an elder. Thus when men have been ordained to this office, the church will have the confidence that it has recognized the overseers whom the Holy Spirit has set over it (Acts 20:28). It is evident, therefore that neither the number of elders nor the length of their term of office can be fixed by the church.

A detailed process for recognizing a man for the office of elder is contained in the church’s “Pathway to Eldership” application (Appendix 3). The qualifications for a man chosen to fill the office of elder are clearly set forth in Scripture, particularly in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

**Deacons.** Deacons are servants of the Body (Acts 6:1-7) and as such are to carry out and/or oversee all areas of service that have been assigned to them by the elders. Deacons serve so that the elders may devote themselves without distraction to their responsibilities (Acts 6:3-4). They must fulfill the duties of their office in cooperation with and in subjection to the elders.

Neither the number of deacons nor the length of their term of office shall be fixed. The church shall choose as many as are needed for the work to be done from among the men who give evidence of having the scriptural qualifications for that office.

A detailed process for recognizing, approaching, and recommending a man for the office of deacon is contained in the church’s “Pathway to Deaconship” application (Appendix 4). The qualifications for a man chosen to fulfill the office of deacon are particularly set forth in Acts 6:3 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

**Appointment of Office Bearers.** The local church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is responsible to appoint men to the offices of elder and deacon. Each individual involved should have an inward conviction that the Lord is calling him to the particular office, and the church should recognize that call as it observes in the individual evidence of the gifts and graces which the Scripture requires for the particular office. This is a matter of such gravity that it should be accompanied by much prayerful waiting on God for guidance, a careful study of the relevant passages of Scripture, and an objective evaluation of each man nominated to a particular office. These activities are the responsibility of each individual member of the church as well as of the church as a whole.

The process of appointing office bearers shall be governed by the procedures listed in the Pathway to Eldership (Appendix 3) and/or the Pathway to Deaconship (Appendix 4).

No less that two-thirds majority of the members present and voting shall be necessary for the election of an office bearer.

## ARTICLE IX

### **Congregational Meetings**

**Business Meetings.** Stated business meetings shall be semi-annual (September and April) for the purpose of establishing the annual budget, reviewing the budget, the hearing of reports, and the transaction of other business. Additional business meetings may be scheduled at the discretion of the elders.

**Notice of Business Meetings.** Notice of Business Meetings shall be given at regular worship services on two successive Lord's Days immediately prior to such meetings. However, in the case of an emergency, a meeting may be scheduled and called on shorter notice by notifying each regular member by "phone tree" of the time, place, and purpose of the meeting. An agenda will be made available one week prior to those meetings, which are scheduled in advance.

Meetings called on short notice will be for the purposes of providing information, seeking the counsel of the congregation, or other pressing needs. If information is shared which requires a vote, no vote will be taken at said meeting due to the fact that it was called on short notice. A date will be scheduled for a congregational vote; however, the scheduled date of vote will not be subject to any set amount of "down time". The elders will determine the amount of time needed for the congregation to consider the issues before them.

**Quorum.** The regular members present at any properly convened Business Meeting shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business.

**Voting.** All members and regular attenders are encouraged to attend all church business meetings; however, only members will be allowed to speak and vote. All members who have reached the age of eighteen years and are in good standing in the church may vote on any question properly brought before the congregation. We recognize that scripture nowhere expressly stipulates an age requirement or limitation on voting, and that there is the distinct probability that there will be members in good standing under the age of eighteen. However, the nature of voting is to express what the mind of Christ is understood to be in particular situations. The maturity required to discern that mind, both by way of understanding the situation and the Biblical principles which apply to it, preclude, under ordinary circumstances, a person of younger years from being able to vote in a responsible manner due to lack of experience, judgment, and wisdom (1 Corinthians 13:11, 14:20.)

Unanimity of heart and mind under God shall at all times be sought and prayed for (Acts 6:5), but when unanimity is not realized, not less than a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting shall be required to make a resolution valid. The only exception to this rule is as it concerns the voting of elders (as an elder board). For elders to bring an issue before the congregation there must be unanimity of vote among them.

Congregational voting shall be public. Secret balloting methods shall be strictly prohibited. Upon request, an absentee ballot may be issued to a member subject to elder council approval. In such cases ballots will require that the name of the member be included on said ballot. The name of the member and vote will be read publicly. Ballots received without a “name” will not be included in the vote. Reasons for absentee balloting include, but are not limited to, being out of town, scheduled work, sickness, emergency, or death in the family.

Items subject to congregational vote: annual church budget, the creation of a salaried position, the salary of said position, salary increases, building construction, any proposed amendments to these by-laws, and the approval of ordination for deacon and elder candidates.

Items not subject to congregational vote: The elders shall oversee the day-to-day operations of the church and may appoint deacons to serve in various capacities of said operations. The elders shall oversee the expenditures of the budget, but shall not violate the budget, in any category, without consulting the church. The elders shall have the authority to interview and hire employees and/or staff to fill positions that have been approved by the church. The elders shall have the authority to dismiss employees and/or staff. The elders will supervise all church employees and/or staff. The elders may appoint members to serve on various “Teams” such as a “Building Team.” The elders may remove persons from “Teams” at their discretion.

**Church Life Gatherings** are normally scheduled quarterly. The primary purpose of these meetings is to communicate and discuss the vision and needs of the church ministries, to discuss other issues facing the church, and to address covenant issues such as the membership process and church discipline. Issues discussed at Church Life Gatherings are not subject to vote. All members and regular attenders are encouraged to attend all Church Life Gatherings; however, only members will be allowed to speak.

## ARTICLE X

### **By-Laws**

The elders shall draft and amend from time to time said by-laws, as they shall deem necessary. However, unanimous elder approval and two-thirds congregational approval is required in order to officially amend said by-laws.

## ARTICLE XI

### **Amendments**

Any Article section of said by-laws may be amended under the voting rules set forth in Section X with the exception of Article IV. In order to amend Article IV (Articles of Faith), both a unanimous elder and a unanimous congregational vote will be required.

## ARTICLE XII

**Appendixes**

The Ephesus Church “Membership Covenant” (Appendix 1), the “Ephesus Church Process for Membership” (Appendix 2), “Pathway to Eldership” (Appendix 3), and the “Pathway to Deaconship” (Appendix 4) are hereby recognized as an official part of said by-laws of Ephesus Church.