



livinghope

community church

CONSTITUTION

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Introduction to the Constitution

The Constitution of Living Hope Community Church is designed to help our church operate in a biblically faithful manner. Like most such documents, it covers basic issues related to membership, congregational meetings, the responsibilities of church officers, and the use of church property. Other issues such as biblical counseling, confidentiality, and conflict resolution, are covered in a separate document.

At first glance, you may wonder why a church needs a constitution. Part of the reason for this is that people have differing expectations as to how a church should conduct its affairs and treat its members. Therefore, it is often necessary to develop detailed guidelines to eliminate the possibility of misunderstandings and division.

We developed this Constitution as a means of establishing commonly accepted standards for how we would treat one another and govern ourselves as a body. In particular, these regulations are designed to accomplish these goals:

- They help to prevent surprises and disappointed expectations by providing potential members with a thorough explanation of how the church intends to govern itself.
- They reduce the likelihood of confusion and conflict within the church by establishing clear operational guidelines.
- They prevent the misuse of authority by church leaders or congregations by limiting their powers and establishing procedures for order and accountability.

Most people would agree that these are worthwhile goals, but some might still be troubled by the amount of detail found in the Constitution. They might say, "Why can't we live with just a few general rules?"

This human need for detailed guidance is clearly reflected in Scripture. Instead of giving us only the two great commandments (love God and love your neighbor), God gave us the Ten Commandments. And he didn't stop there. Realizing our weakness and our sinful tendency to ignore or distort his commandments, God instructed Moses to set forth dozens of detailed laws on how we should behave (see Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy). All of these laws are summed up in the two great commandments, but even Jesus knew that until the world is renewed, we will still need the helpful guidance of the more detailed moral principles set forth throughout Scripture (see Matthew 5:17-7:6).

One of the places that we sometimes need this kind of detailed guidance is in the church. Scripture does not tell us exactly how to give notice or establish quorums for congregational meetings, what information should remain confidential and what may be shared with others, how long church officers should serve without re-election, or how to dispose of property if a church dissolves. The Constitution is designed to answer these types of questions, and will hopefully spare us from unnecessary confusion and conflict, help us to act in consistent, Biblical and respectful ways, and allow us to devote ourselves to the more important matters of God's kingdom.

CONSTITUTION OF LIVING HOPE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Article I—Name

The name by which this organization shall be known in law shall be Living Hope Community Church (as the "Church"), and shall be a non-profit corporation under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Article II—Purpose

The purpose of this church is:

- A. To glorify God through joyful worship, strategic evangelism, and effective ministry training;
- B. To operate exclusively for religious, charitable, and educational purposes within the classification of legal charities; and no part of the net earnings of the organization shall inure to the benefit of any private stockholder or individual; and no substantial part of the activities of the organization, or any receipt of its funds, shall be utilized for any other purpose except those purposes mentioned above. The church shall not have or issue shares of stock, and no dividends shall be paid. No part of the income or assets of the church shall be distributed to any member or officer without full consideration. The church is prohibited from lending money to guarantee the obligation of a member or officer of the church. No member or officer of the church has any vested right, interest or privilege in or to the assets, property, functions, or activities of the church. The church may contract in due course, for reasonable consideration, with its members or officers without violating this provision.

Article III—Doctrinal Statement

The one true and living God, who exists eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, reveals himself in the Bible and the world as Creator, Preserver, and sovereign Ruler of all things. He is infinite in his wisdom and knowledge, almighty in his power, unchangeable in his love, and righteous in all his ways. Adam and Eve were created in God's image to have fellowship with him. Tempted by Satan, they rebelled against God and were alienated from him. As a result they and their descendants became guilty, subject to sin's power, inclined toward disobedience to God's law, and unable to please God apart from his saving grace.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, while remaining fully divine became fully human through a miraculous conception and virgin birth. He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father and died a substitutionary death, thereby reconciling to God all who believe in him and ensuring their salvation from sin and its results. He achieved victory over death and the powers of evil, rose bodily from the grave, and ascended into heaven where, as the only mediator between God and humanity, he continually intercedes for his people.

The Holy Spirit of God implements the purposes of God. He applies the saving work of Christ to sinful human beings, giving them new life, bringing them into fellowship with God, and equipping them for godly living and service.

The sixty-six books of the Bible are the inspired Word of God, the complete revelation of his will for the salvation of human beings. They are true in all that they affirm and without error as originally written, the only infallible and sufficient rule for faith and life (II Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible speaks to God's creation of men and women as separate and distinct, but complementary sexes, created in His image (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:45). God created marriage as the union between one man and one woman, and intimate sexual activity is meant to be shared within the context of marriage. Likewise, the Bible affirms that all human life, while born into a state of sin, is sacred and created by God in His image. Human life is of inestimable worth in all its dimensions, including pre-born babies, the aged, the physically or mentally challenged, and every other stage or condition from conception through natural death (Gen. 1:27; Matt. 6:25-26; Rom. 13:9). As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to repent of all sin and live a life of servant leadership, humility and pursue sanctification in our daily activities.

Salvation is deliverance from alienation, guilt, bondage, and death, as well as restoration to fellowship, righteousness, freedom, and life, for all who trust in Jesus Christ and him alone. It originates in and is sustained by God's sovereign and loving grace apart from any human merit, is based solely on Christ's saving work, is received by faith alone, and is expressed in a lifetime of developing holiness, obedience, and love.

The Church is the Body of Christ, the community of all believers who are united to Christ and to one another by the Holy Spirit. The Church is called to worship God and to demonstrate his gracious character in the world by proclaiming the gospel, making disciples from all nations, observing baptism and the Lord's Supper, maintaining the unity and purity of the Body, and seeking to apply the truths of Scripture to the needs of all people.

At the close of this age Christ will return to raise the dead, establish his kingdom on earth, and judge all people. The unrighteous will experience everlasting conscious suffering in hell, but the righteous will experience everlasting life and fellowship with God in heaven.

This Doctrinal Statement does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God that speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality, and the proper conduct of mankind, is the sole and final source of all that we believe. For purposes of the church's faith, doctrine, practice, policy, and discipline, our Board of Elders is the church's final interpretive authority on the Bible's meaning and application. The Board of Elders may from time to time issue statements to clarify the Bible's meaning and application.

Article IV—Position Statements

A. Baptism

We believe that the New Testament is best understood as teaching that baptism should be administered only to those who are able to give a credible profession of their faith in Christ (Acts 2:38, 41). For this reason we do not practice infant baptism. However, we recognize that infant baptism has a long tradition of support in the history of the church. Therefore, we will accept simply a Christian baptism, including infant baptism, for membership purposes, but will encourage all members to be baptized as believers.

B. Lord's Supper

We believe that all those who follow Jesus are called to remember his death, resurrection, and return by sharing in the Lord's Supper. This celebration of our communion with Christ is also to be a celebration of our unity with other believers in the body of Christ. Anyone who has a credible profession of faith is encouraged to participate in the communion, unless that person is willfully engaging in sin, persists in teaching false doctrine or creating division, or is being disciplined by another church for such practice. (Matt. 26:26-29; Lk. 22:15-20; 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:17-34)

Article V—Membership

A. Qualifications

Membership in this church is established to meet legal requirements and to facilitate mutual accountability and good order. Applications for membership shall be submitted to the Board of Elders in writing. In order to qualify for membership a person must:

- have a clear confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
- be baptized (see statement above under Article IV, A)
- agree to live within the structure of the constitution of this church and doctrinal statement
- be no less than 12 years old. Members under the age of 18 shall not be accorded voting privileges, but may contribute to the church's decision-making process.
- commit to support the church through prayer, ministry, and giving
- complete the membership course for Living Hope Community Church

B. Termination of Membership

1. Membership may be terminated by vote of the Board of Elders for any of the following reasons:
 - disagreement with the doctrinal statement

commitment to another church
relocation out of the area
inactive membership for one year
for persistent refusal to submit to church discipline

2. Members may be removed from membership at their own request by informing the Elders of their intention to withdraw and the reasons therefore. If a member requests to withdraw because of specific problems or disappointments with the church, the Elders shall attempt to resolve those matters so that the member may remain in the church and enjoy greater fruitfulness and personal spiritual growth.

C. Voting

A quorum of the membership shall be 50% of all voting members. In case of a tie, the vote shall be decided by recommendation of the Board of Elders. When a vote is taken and the total vote does not equal at least 51% of the total voting membership, uninformed or absent voting members may, at the decision of the Elders, be informed, if possible, and given one week to submit a late ballot before the vote is decided.

Article VI—Leadership

- A. The leadership of this church exists to honor Christ as the Head of the church and to serve the good of the congregation. Following the biblical pattern the leadership of this church shall include Elders (pastors), and Deacons whom we have designated “Ministry Team.” (Acts 6:1-7; I Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4) All committees and officers of the church are responsible to the Elders, as well as to the congregation. Elders shall be chosen in accordance with the provisions of Article VII, below.
- B. The Elders, acting as a Board, shall provide governance for the church by overseeing the teaching of the faith, giving spiritual direction, encouraging prayer and providing for pastoral care. Elders shall be spiritually mature men who meet biblical leadership qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 6:1-2-4; I Peter 5:1-4).

Elders are at-large pastors recognized by the membership as servant leaders. Under Christ, all leaders, staff, committees and congregation are accountable to the Elders. Elders are mutually accountable with the membership.

The Board of Elders is the governing body of this church and as such has power and authority to make rules and regulations not inconsistent with the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and this Constitution. The Board of Elders shall oversee the business affairs of the corporation, the conduct of public worship and the spiritual growth and evangelistic witness of the congregation.

The Board of Elders shall have final authority for affairs pertaining to property and other temporal matters as required by civil law for nonprofit corporations. In particular, Board of Elders shall be responsible for the acquisition and disposition of church property and shall coordinate such through those who have been appointed to manage the church’s financial resources. The Board of Elders do not have the power to buy, sell, mortgage, pledge or in any manner encumber any church property worth more than \$50,000, nor to incur any indebtedness exceeding the sum of \$25,000, unless first authorized to do so at a members’ meeting, either through the adoption of the annual budget or by special action of the membership. The Elders may delegate to other committees or congregational members such of these responsibilities as it deems appropriate.

The Board of Elders of the church may elect to hire paid staff to coordinate various aspects of the church.

- C. While spiritual gifts appear to be given without regard to gender, we believe that the New Testament points to a basic distinction between men and women that we try to observe in our church practice. This distinction has to do with the exercise of authority on behalf of the whole church. The crucial text for this distinction is 1 Tim. 2:11-15, and although many interpreters would limit the application of these verses only to the Ephesian church or to Paul's day, we believe that the rationale given in verses 13 and 14 point to a transcultural application.

In application of the above principle, we will ask only men to serve as Elders in the church. Elders have the primary responsibility for leadership and teaching in the church. We do not wish to restrict the freedom of women in our congregation beyond this basic biblical principle. For example, we recognize the freedom of both women and men to offer prayer and praise in the various meetings of the church.

- D. A quorum of the Elders shall be at least 50% of the Elders duly appointed by the membership.
- E. The act of a majority present at an Elders meeting at which a quorum is present (when the vote is taken) shall be the act of the Board of Elders as the governing body. A member of the Board of Elders shall be deemed to have approved of an action taken if he is present at a meeting of the of Elders unless: 1) he objects at the beginning of the meeting (or promptly upon arrival) to holding it or transacting business at the meeting; or 2) his dissent or abstention from the action taken is entered in the minutes of the meeting; or 3) he did not approve the action and delivers written notice of dissent or abstention to the presiding officer of the meeting before its adjournment or immediately after adjournment of the meeting.
- F. Officers of the Church (Corporation)

The Elders shall appoint the officers of the church (corporation). The Elders, no less than annually, shall elect from among themselves a Chair and Vice Chair of the Board of Elders. The Board of Elders may designate a Secretary and a Treasurer who may be chosen from the members of the congregation, or from staff members, due to their spiritual gifts and desire to serve.

The chair shall serve as the president of the nonprofit corporation, and he shall in general supervise and conduct, in good faith, all of the business and affairs of the church. The chair shall, when present, preside at all meetings of the Board of Elders and membership, or designate another officer to the same, and shall conduct such meetings so as to facilitate free and respectful debate and decision making. The chair, with the secretary or any other proper officer of the church that the Elders have authorized, may sign corporation deeds, mortgages, bonds, contracts, or other instruments authorized by the Board of Elders.

The vice-chair shall perform, in good faith, the duties of the chair if the chair is absent, dies, is unable or refuses to act. If the vice-chair acts in the absence of the chairman, the vice-chair shall have all of the powers of and be subject to all the restrictions upon the chairman.

The secretary shall in good faith: 1) create and maintain one or more books for the minutes of the proceedings of the members and of the Board of Elders; 2) be custodian of the church and corporate records; 3) when requested or required, authenticate any records of the church; 4) in general perform all duties incident to the office of secretary.

The treasurer shall: 1) have charge and custody of and be responsible for all funds and securities of the church; 2) receive and give receipts for monies due and payable to the church from any source, and deposit all monies in the church's name in banks, trust companies, or other depositories selected; 3) submit the books and records to a Certified Public Accountant or other accountant if directed to do so; and 4) in general perform all of the duties incident to the office of treasurer.

- G. The Ministry Team shall coordinate and oversee the various ministries of the church under the direction of the Elders. Its members shall be elected by the membership. They may establish such committees as it deems necessary for the work of the church. A quorum of the Ministry Team shall be at least 50% of the duly appointed members.

Article VII—Selection of Elders and Other Leaders

- A. The Board of Elders shall appoint a nominating committee from the membership of the church. No more than half of those appointed to the nominating committee may be presently serving as Elders or members of the Ministry Team. The nominating committee in consultation with the congregation and with the approval of the Elders shall submit to the membership its list of nominees to serve as Elders and Ministry Team members. The membership at its annual meeting shall vote to confirm or disallow the appointment of the proposed nominees.
- B. The Elders and Ministry Team shall be presented to the membership on a rotating basis for re-confirmation every two years. The maximum term of office for a member of the Elders or Ministry Team member shall be six years with a minimum of one year's absence before reappointment. The Lead Pastor shall be a voting "*ex officio*" member of the Elders and as such shall have no term limits. The Lead Pastor shall serve under the direction of the Elders.

In addition, it may be appropriate for other employed pastoral staff to serve as "*ex officio*" members of the Elders and/or Ministry Team, and may or may not be accorded voting rights. Such determination shall be made at the discretion of the Elders.

- C. If a Ministry Team leader is elected at a meeting other than the annual members' meeting, his/her regular term shall expire at the time of the second annual members' meeting following his/her election.
- D. Other Leaders

Other leaders within the church that the Elders or Ministry Team appoints shall be spiritually mature men or women who meet the biblical requirements for effective ministry.

- E. Removal of Leaders

Elders and Ministry Team members may be removed from office by majority vote of all the Elders, or by an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of a quorum of the voting membership at a duly-called members' meeting.

Article VIII—Members' Meetings

- A. There shall be an annual members' meeting at a time designated by the Elders. The agenda shall include annual reports from the Elders, the presentation of a church budget for approval, and a vote to appoint or reappoint Elders and other leaders.
- B. Other members' meetings may be called as needed by the Elders. A two-Sunday advance notice shall be required before any members' meeting is held. When a meeting is called for the transaction of specific matters of business, no business shall be conducted except that which is stated in the notice.

Article IX—Church Records

- A. The Elders shall ensure that the following records are kept: 1) minutes of Elders and Ministry Team meetings; 2) minutes of the meetings of the membership; 3) a list of the members including the date on which they became members; 4) resolutions adopted by the Elders; 5) appropriate accounting records; 6) its articles or restated articles of incorporation and all amendments to them currently in effect; and 7) its Constitution and Bylaws and all amendments to them currently in effect.

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

Article X—Ownership and Distribution of Property

- A. The church shall hold, own, and enjoy its own personal and real property, without any right of reversion to another entity, except as provided in this Constitution and Bylaws.
- B. This corporation may be dissolved only by the recommendation of the Elders and a majority vote of a quorum of the voting membership.
- C. "Dissolution" means the complete disbanding of the church so that it no longer functions as a congregation or as a corporate entity. Upon the dissolution of the church, its property shall be applied and distributed as follows: 1) all liabilities and obligations of the church shall be paid and discharged or adequate provision shall be made therefore; 2) assets held by the church upon condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance, which condition occurs by reason of the dissolution, shall be returned, transferred, or conveyed in accordance with such requirements; 3) assets received and not held upon a condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance by reason of the dissolution, shall be transferred or conveyed to one or more domestic or foreign corporations, societies, or organizations that qualify as exempt organizations under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954

(or the responding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law), and are engaged in activities substantially similar to those of the corporation; this distribution shall be done pursuant to a plan adopted by the Elders, provided that no assets are distributed to any organization governed by a member of the Elders; and 4) any assets not otherwise disposed of shall be disposed of by a court of competent jurisdiction of the county in which the principal office of the corporation is then located, for such purposes and to such organizations as said court shall determine.

Article XI—Indemnification of Officers

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

Article XII—Revisions to this Constitution

Revisions to this Constitution may be made by recommendation of the Board of Elders and an affirmative vote of two-thirds (2/3) of a quorum of the voting membership at a duly-called members' meeting.