

CONSTITUTION
OF
EXETER CHAPEL

JANUARY 1, 1986

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PREAMBLE

As Christians, we believe that the New Testament is properly and ultimately the constitution (governing document) of the local church. Therefore, the constitution which follows here has been kept as brief and simple as possible. We have included only those provisions that are required for legal incorporation, that define our doctrinal and practical basis, and that will guide us in church membership, the duties and selection of church officers (Elders and Deacons), and the carrying out of church business. Much has been omitted regarding the life, functions, and ministries of the local church and its members.

In addition, we have endeavored to maintain flexibility for future developments, to avoid institutionalizing an excessive bureaucracy, and to leave the members free to devote themselves to ministries of edification and evangelism. Most of all, we have tried to give practical expression to the truth that Christ is the Head of His Church and it is His will that the members desire to follow in all the affairs and decisions of the church.

I. NAME

The name of this church shall be Exeter Chapel

II. AFFILIATION

Exeter Chapel is an independent Baptist church. We desire to maintain fellowship with other assemblies of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, especially those which adhere to the Scriptural doctrines and standards set forth in Section IV.

III. PURPOSE

The purpose of this church shall be:

1. To worship and glorify God;
2. To edify believers in our Lord Jesus Christ;
3. To evangelize the unsaved both in our local community and throughout the world.

IV. ARTICLES OF FAITH and CHURCH COVENANT

Exeter Chapel acknowledges the Holy Scriptures as our supreme authority in all matters of belief and practice. Specifically, the members of this church shall recognize and uphold the following Articles of Faith and Church Covenant:

ARTICLES OF FAITH

ARTICLE 1 – GOD

We believe that there is only one living and true God, Creator of heaven and earth; that he possesses all possible perfections and each in an infinite degree; and that he exists eternally in three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the same in essence and equal in every divine perfection.

Exodus 20:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; Genesis 1:1; Exodus 15:11; John 10:30; Matthew 28:19

ARTICLE 2 – CHRIST: HIS PERSON

We believe that the Son, who is the Word of the Father, the true and eternal God, took man's nature of the virgin Mary, so that two whole and perfect natures, the Godhead and manhood, were joined together in one person; thus Christ is true God and true man. As to his manhood, he was in every respect like us, except without sin.

John 1:1, 14; Philippians 2:6-8; Matthew 1:23; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 4:15

ARTICLE 3 – CHRIST: HIS WORK

We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ truly suffered, died, and was buried to be a sacrifice both for original sin and for the actual sins of man, thereby reconciling us to the Father. On the third day he rose again bodily from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God, where he ever lives to make intercession for the redeemed.

1 Corinthians 15:3, 4; Romans 5:18, 19; Isaiah 53:4-6; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18; 2 Corinthians 5:18; Acts 2:32, 33 Hebrews 7:25

ARTICLE 4 – HOLY SPIRIT

We believe that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, was sent by the Father and the Son to convict the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; to effect the new birth; to baptize all believers into the body of Christ; to indwell them permanently; and to lead them into all the truth.

John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7-11, 13; John 3:3-8; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Romans 8:9

ARTICLE 5 – THE SCRIPTURES

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of God, whose teaching, whether on matters of faith, history, or nature, is to be regarded as true without any mixture of error. The Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation, so that whatever is not found therein and cannot be proved thereby is neither to be required as an article of faith nor regarded as necessary to salvation.

2 Timothy 3:15-17; 2 Peter 1:21; John 10:35; Revelation 22:18, 19

ARTICLE 6 – MAN

We believe that man was created in the image of God, male and female, in a holy and happy state; but by his disobedience to the law of his Creator, he not only exposed himself to personal misery, but involved all his descendants in the temporal and eternal consequences of sin. As an effect of his fall, the whole human race possesses a depraved nature, by which men are prone to choose and delight in evil and disinclined to things morally good.

Genesis 1:27, 31; 3:1-24; Romans 3:10-18, 23; 5:12; 6:23; 8:7; Psalm 51:5; 58:3; Ephesians 2:1-3

ARTICLE 7 – SALVATION

We believe that the only way of salvation from man's state of guilt and condemnation is through the righteousness and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now exalted at God's hand as Prince and Savior, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins. Salvation is by grace through faith, apart from any human merit or works, so that whoever believes in Christ shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Acts 4:12; 5:31; Romans 3:21-26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 2:8, 9; John 3:16

ARTICLE 8 – PERSEVERANCE

We believe that Christ died for our sins and rose again for our justification; and we have the fullest assurance that those who are truly born of the Spirit and believe in Christ shall never be lost, and that those who die in the Lord shall rise again to a glorious immortality. Therefore, it is the duty of all believers to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure by sincere and loving obedience to the commands and teachings of God's Word.

Romans 4:25; John 6:39; 10:28, 29; Philippians 1:6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Peter 1:10,11

ARTICLE 9 – THE FUTURE

We believe that Christ will come a second time, personally and visibly, with power and great glory, and that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust. The just will be raised incorruptible and, together with the righteous living, changed in a moment, shall be rewarded according to the deeds done in the body and received into Christ's kingdom and glory; and so shall they ever be with the Lord. The unjust shall awake to shame and everlasting condemnation.

Hebrews 9:28; Acts 1:11; Matthew 16:27; Acts 24:15; 1 Corinthians 15:51, 52; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9

ARTICLE 10 – THE LORD'S DAY

We believe that the first day of the week, called the Lord's Day, ought to be kept holy; and that it is our duty to assemble on that day and worship God in a public manner, by offering up our prayers and thanksgiving, by giving attention to the preaching of the Word, and by observing the ordinances of the church.

Exodus 20:8-11; John 20:1, 19, 26; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; Hebrews 10:25; Revelation 1:10

ARTICLE 11 – THE ORDINANCES

We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordinances instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ to be continued until his second coming. Only those who have professed their faith in Christ have a Scriptural right to baptism; and this ordinance is to be administered by immersion only, signifying our union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic remembrance of Christ's broken body and of his shed blood.

Matthew 28:19; John 3:23; Acts 2:38, 41; 8:36-39; Romans 6:3, 4; Luke 22:19, 20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

ARTICLE 12 – THE CHURCH

We believe that the church is the spiritual body of Christ, of which he is the head, composed of all true believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. This body is expressed on earth in local congregations of believers, united together for worship, for mutual edification, and for the spread of the Gospel throughout the

world. Officers of the local church are pastors (or bishops or elders) and deacons, whose qualifications and duties are clearly set forth in the letters of the New Testament.

Colossians 1:18; Acts 2:41, 42; Hebrews 10:25; Matthew 28:18-20; Philippians 1:1;
1 Timothy 3:1-13

CHURCH COVENANT

HAVING BEEN LED by the Spirit of God to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior and, on the profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, we do now in the presence of God, angels, and this assembly most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

WE RESOLVE, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit,
to walk together in unity;
to strive for the advancement of this church in truth, holiness, and love;
to promote its spirituality and prosperity;
to assemble regularly for worship, prayer, instruction, and the ordinances;
to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church,
the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.

WE ALSO RESOLVE
to maintain family and personal devotions;
to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;
to seek the salvation of our family and friends;
to walk circumspectly in the world;
to be just in all our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our conduct;
to avoid all gossip, slander, and excessive anger;
to abstain from anything that might harm our testimony for Christ or cause a brother to
stumble;
to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Savior.

WE FURTHER RESOLVE
to watch over one another in brotherly love;
to remember each other in prayer;
to aid each other in sickness and distress;
to discover and exercise our spiritual gifts;
to cultivate Christian compassion and courtesy in speech;
to be slow to take offense but always ready for reconciliation and, mindful of the rule of
our Savior, to secure it without delay.

WE MOREOVER RESOLVE
that, when we remove from this place, we will as soon as possible unite with some other
church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word.

V. MEMBERSHIP

A. Admission of Members

The Scriptures encourage every believer to be an active member of a local church. Any person is eligible to become a member of Exeter Chapel who: 1) has repented of his sin and believes in our Lord Jesus Christ, 2) has been baptized as a believer by immersion, and 3) subscribes to the Articles of Faith and Church Covenant.

Individuals who desire to become members of Exeter Chapel will make this known to the Elders. The Elders will see that appropriate instruction is given to the applicants and make inquiry concerning their faith, life, and previous church relationships. Applicants will become members upon recommendation of the Elders and subsequent approval by the congregation. Baptized believers will be received on the basis of their testimony and Christian experience and will become members immediately on approval. New believers will become members upon their baptism. New members will be publicly recognized as such by the Right Hand of Fellowship given at a subsequent meeting of the church.

B. Separation of Members

Separation of members shall be by recommendation of the Elders and subsequent approval of the congregation. Such separation may occur for the following reasons:

1. A member in good standing, who desires to unite with another church of like faith and practice, may request a letter of dismissal from Exeter Chapel.
2. An individual may request that his membership be terminated. The Elders will inquire concerning the reasons for the request and give admonition as appropriate.
3. A member who habitually absents himself from the services of the church without sufficient reason may be removed from the membership, usually after a period of one year. A non-resident member who has not united with a like-minded church within one year of his departure and has not provided satisfactory explanation to the church may be removed from membership.
4. An individual may be removed from membership by reason of church discipline. As used here, church discipline refers to those corrective steps which a church might take in order to recover one of its members from sin or error. These steps include admonition, temporary removal from church ministries, or removal from church membership. In exercising discipline, this church shall follow the pattern laid down by our Lord in Matthew 18:15-17 in a spirit of gentleness, humility, love wisdom, patience, sorrow, prayer and with the authority of Christ. Such matters as false doctrine, divisiveness, habitual sin (such as those listed in I Corinthians 5:11), and unresolved grievances, if persisted in without repentance, may result in removal from church membership. If the church does take such action, it shall be with the hope and aim of eventual restoration.

VI. OFFICERS

Exeter Chapel acknowledges the Lord Jesus Christ as the living Head of His body, the Church Under His rule, the officers of this church shall be Elders and Deacons, selected by the congregation according to the New Testament qualifications and exercising their responsibilities according to the New Testament pattern. These officers shall serve the congregation and enlist the members to use their gifts to serve in the various ministries of the church. All officers shall be members of the church.

A. Elders

The Elders will serve the church as overseers, spiritual shepherds, and leaders. Specifically, they shall:

1. Exercise ministries of prayer and the Word; practice hospitality and engage in visitation; and lead the congregation by an exemplary Christian life.
2. See to the preparation of believers for baptism and church membership.
3. See to the equipping of the members for service and appoint them to ministries under their supervision. The appointments shall be reviewed annually.
4. Oversee all the ministries of worship, edification, and evangelism.
5. Supervise the work of the Deacons.
6. Preside over the worship and business meetings of the church.
7. See to the exercise of church discipline, if required.
8. Determine the specific ministry of each Elder taking into account the differing gifts, experience and time available of each. They shall review these ministry assignments annually.

The Elders will act together in making their decisions and appointments, each one sharing fully in the decision-making process. All final decisions shall be made by unanimous consent.

B. Deacons

The Deacons will assist the Elders by caring for the practical needs of the church. Specifically, they shall:

1. Serve as trustees of any properties acquired by the church.
2. Appoint from among their number one to serve as church treasurer and one to serve as church clerk.
3. Care for all matters relating to facilities and equipment.
4. Give attention to assisting members who are in material need.
5. Assist the Elders through prayer and counsel, as needed.
6. After consultation with the Elders, the Deacons shall prepare an annual budget to be submitted to the Elders and then to the congregation for their approval. Copies of the proposed budget shall be made available to the congregation at least two

weeks in advance of the annual meeting. The Deacons together are authorized to alter the annual budget (to expend funds not provided in the budget) to carry out the work of the church. Such expenditure of funds in any calendar year shall not exceed 2% of the annual budget approved by the church for that year.

7. Determine, in consultation with the Elders, the specific ministry of each Deacon. They shall review these ministry assignments annually.
8. Care for other responsibilities that the Elders may from time to time delegate to them.
8. The Deacons will be assisted in their work by individuals and by various committees, as needed. The Deacons, in consultation with the Elders, will make appointments to the ministries under their supervision. These appointments shall be reviewed annually.

When the Deacons meet, they shall act together in making their decisions and appointments, each one sharing fully in the decision-making process. All final decisions shall be made by unanimous consent.

C. Selection of Officers

Exeter Chapel recognizes that it is God who appoints leaders in the church. The congregation shall seek to determine His will by observing the following procedures:

1. After a period of serious prayer and instruction by the Elders, recommendations for officers will be received from the congregation. The Elders and Deacons will likewise submit their recommendations for officers.
2. The Elders, assisted by the Deacons, will prayerfully review these recommendations and then together make a unanimous recommendation to the congregation of those individuals who are qualified and willing to serve.
3. After the names are announced and a date set to consider their appointment, the members of the congregation will be urged to clarify questions or problems concerning any candidate with him, the Elders, or the Deacons, before the meeting.
4. The announced candidates will become officers of the church upon approval by the congregation, following the procedure outlined in Section VII.
5. Elders and Deacons chosen for office will be set apart for their ministry by the laying on of hands.
6. The Elders and Deacons shall review annually the possible need for additional officers.
7. In the absence of a full-time pastor-teacher on the Board of Elders, the Elders and Deacons shall prayerfully consider whether it is necessary to fill this position; and if so, they shall consider whether to fill this position from within the church or by initiating a search for someone from outside the church. Their recommendations will be subject to congregational approval. If the latter course is chosen, the Elders may appoint additional members from the congregation to serve with them on a Search Committee. This committee shall search for and recommend a candidate to the congregation. Upon approval by the church, the candidate will become an Elder of Exeter Chapel and take up his full-time ministry as pastor-teacher.
8. In the event that the Eldership consists of only one person, the constitutional duties of the Elders will be carried out by an ad hoc Steering Committee consisting of the Elder and Deacons, until such time as additional Elders are added to the Board. In the event of a shortage of Deacons, the Elders may appoint, on a temporary basis, individuals from the

congregation to fulfill the constitutional duties of Deacons, until such time as additional Deacons are chosen.

D. Terms of Office

Elders and Deacons shall serve the congregation as long as their ministry is satisfactory to themselves, their colleagues, and the congregation, and as long as their lives are consistent with the Biblical qualifications. Officers may request a leave of absence from their duties for a period of up to a year. Normally, such leaves of absence would occur only after an officer's third year of continuous service or because of an unforeseen emergency. A request for a leave of absence will be acted upon by the current officers. Resignations of officers shall be submitted to the Elders, who will make recommendation for action by the church. Members who believe that an officer's life or ministry is in need of correction should take the private steps prescribed in Matthew 18:15 and Galatians 6:1. Continuing problems or serious matters shall be handled in accordance with Matthew 18:16,17 and I Timothy 5:19-21.

VII. MEETINGS

A. For Worship

Exeter Chapel shall hold public services on each Lord's Day and mid-week meetings for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. As desired, additional meetings for worship, edification, or evangelism will be scheduled by or through the Elders.

B. For business

1. Calling Business Meetings

The annual business meeting shall be conducted at a time to be determined by the elders and deacons that is most appropriate for the church's fiscal year for the purpose of adopting a budget, receiving reports, and handling other items of business. The elders and/or deacons may call other business meetings by making announcement on the previous Sunday or earlier. Members of the church who believe a particular matter merits the attention of the church may request the Elders and/or deacons to include it on the agenda of the next business meeting. The receiving of new members may be acted upon at any regular scheduled church service.

2. Conducting Business Meetings

Christ is the head of the church and it is the responsibility of each member in any business matter to endeavor to discern the mind of His Spirit. The mind of the Spirit is indicated by the gradual unifying of the conviction and opinion of the members in support of a particular plan or decision, so that the whole church moves together. This unity is to be achieved through individual and corporate prayer, the study of relevant Scriptures, and the open sharing of differing views by members of the congregation. Only those decisions which receive the unanimous consent of the congregational meeting will be carried out. In the event that an item of business receives a majority vote but fails for lack of unanimity, it shall be tabled for later consideration. This rule of unanimity may be set aside in the following

exceptional instance: The Elders and Deacons, after prayer and discussion with the dissenting members, may jointly recommend at a later meeting that the will of the majority be allowed to prevail in the matter, provided that the recommendation is presented within three months of the original motion. In such cases, the presiding Elder shall declare the motion as carried.

The presiding Elder shall see that the business meetings are conducted decently and in order, with impartiality, with opportunity for free and open discussion, in Christian love and with mutual respect between the members.

VIII. AMENDMENTS

This constitution may be amended by approval of the congregation (following the procedure set forth in Section VII) at any regularly called business meeting, provided that copies of proposed amendments are distributed at least two weeks in advance of the meeting.