



Village Bible Church

**Constitution of
Village Bible Church
of Sugar Grove, Illinois
including all campuses**

Ratified by members August 4, 2019

VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

CONSTITUTION

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**CONSTITUTION OF
VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH OF SUGAR GROVE, ILLINOIS
INCLUDING ALL CAMPUSES**

We the members of all campuses of **Village Bible Church** recognize that the Word of God sets forth the divine plan for the local church, and upon this basis we establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit.

**ARTICLE I
NAME**

This organization will be known as **Village Bible Church of Sugar Grove, Illinois**, by which name it is incorporated under the Illinois Religious Corporation Act of the state of Illinois.

Village Bible Church is organized exclusively for charitable, religious and educational purposes within the meaning of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, as amended (or the corresponding provision of any future United States revenue law).

**ARTICLE II
PURPOSE**

It is the purpose of Village Bible Church to discover, develop and deploy disciples who are “all in” for God’s Kingdom, both here and around the world.

SECTION 2.A. **ASPECTS OF MINISTRY.** It is the goal of Village Bible Church to bring glory to God through corporate worship, through the ministry of the Word of God, through seeing unbelievers come to faith in Christ, through the discipling and building up of believers for service to God and others and through the worldwide proclamation and demonstration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in order that His Kingdom might be extended.

SECTION 2.B. **INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY.** As an autonomous entity, with no denominational affiliation, Village Bible Church seeks to follow the Word of God in all matters of faith and practice. It is our desire, however, to fellowship, cooperate and at times even partner with other like-minded churches and networks.

ARTICLE III

STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE, CHRISTIAN LIVING AND OTHER MATTERS OF BIBLICAL ETHICS

As members of Village Bible Church, we voluntarily and without reservation agree to accept this Article, with the express purpose of committing ourselves to the teachings of Scripture, both for our own spiritual benefit and also as a basis for our own witness before a watching world. We believe that all spiritual experiences must be based on and nurtured by the truths of Scripture.

This Article is compiled from various sources and reflects those truths we believe beneficial for personal salvation, spiritual growth and a life lived for God's glory. All who teach for this Church do so under the authority of the Guiding Elders and are expected to advocate and not undermine the positions of the Church as stated in this Constitution.

This statement of doctrine expresses what we believe the scriptures teach us about our faith. It is not meant to represent everything Scripture teaches, but rather includes what we believe are the essentials of authentic Christianity.

SECTION 3.A. THE SCRIPTURES. The Bible, composed of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament, was written by men inspired by the Holy Spirit, is God's revelation to humanity and is our final, absolute authority, the only infallible rule of faith and practice. It leads us to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Having been given by God Himself, the Scriptures are fully and verbally inspired. Therefore, as originally given, the Bible is free from error in all it teaches. Each book must be interpreted according to its context and purpose and in reverent obedience to the Lord Who speaks through it in living power. All believers are exhorted to study the Scriptures and diligently apply them to their lives. The Scriptures are the authoritative and normative rule and guide for all Christian practice and doctrine. They are totally sufficient and must not be added to, superseded or changed by later tradition, extra-biblical revelation or worldly wisdom. All doctrine, whether in creed, confession or theology, must be put to the test of the full counsel of God in Holy Scripture. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, Who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.

Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:18-19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:25,44-45; John 5:39; 10:35b; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:23,25; 2 Peter 1:19-21.

SECTION 3.B. GOD. There is only one living and true God, Who is a spiritual and personal Being. He is the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver and Ruler of the universe. His plans and purposes cannot be thwarted. He is infinite in holiness, love and all other perfections. He is all

powerful, all knowing, all wise and present everywhere. His knowledge is perfect and extends to all things, past, present and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. To Him we owe the highest love, reverence and obedience. The eternal and unchanging Triune God reveals Himself to us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being.

- 1. The Father** reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures and human history according to the purposes of His grace. He involves Himself mercifully in human affairs, hears and answers prayer and saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ. He is faithful to every promise, in all things works for the good of those who love Him and in His unfathomable grace gave His Son Jesus Christ for our redemption. *Genesis 1:1; 2:7; Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3,15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15,28-29; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:13-15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:14-17; 1 John 5:1-4.*
- 2. Christ** is the eternal and only Son of God. In His incarnation as Jesus Christ, He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, and in His very nature He is fully God in bodily form. Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of the Father, taking upon Himself human nature and identifying Himself completely with humanity, yet without sin. In His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of human beings from sin. He was raised from the dead with a glorified body and appeared to His disciples as the same person Who was with them before His crucifixion. He ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of the Father, where He is the only Mediator, being fully God and fully man. Through Him believers are reconciled to God. He will return in power and glory to judge the world and to bring His redemptive mission to completion. *Genesis 18:1ff.; Psalms 2:7ff.; 110:1ff.; Isaiah 7:14; 53; Matthew 1:18-23; 3:17; 8:29; 11:27; 14:33; 16:16,27; 17:5; 27; 28:1-6,19; Mark 1:1; 3:11; Luke 1:35; 4:41; 22:70; 24:46; John 1:1-18,29; 10:30,38; 11:25-27; 12:44-50; 14:7-11; 16:15-16,28; 17:1-5, 21-22; 20:1-20,28; Acts 1:9; 2:22-24; 7:55-56; 9:4-5,20; Romans 1:3-4; 3:23-26; 5:6-21; 8:1-3,34; 10:4; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2:2; 8:6; 15:1-8,24-28; 2 Corinthians 5:19-21; 8:9; Galatians 4:4-5; Ephesians 1:20; 3:11; 4:7-10; Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 1:13-22; 2:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18; 1 Timothy 2:5-6; 3:16; Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 4:14-15; 7:14-28; 9:12-15,24-28; 12:2; 13:8; 1 Peter 2:21-25; 3:22; 1 John 1:7-9; 3:2; 4:14-15; 5:9; 2 John 7-9; Revelation 1:13-16; 5:9-14; 12:10-11; 13:8; 19:16.*
- 3. The Holy Spirit**, the Lord and Giver of life, is to be respected, honored and worshipped as God, the third person of the Trinity. Through the proclamation of the Gospel, He persuades people to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. He brings about the new birth, unites believers to Jesus Christ in faith, baptizes them into the Body of Christ and dwells within them. He cultivates Christian character, comforts believers and bestows

the spiritual gifts by which they serve God through His church. He seals believers for the day of redemption. His presence in believers enables them to grow in Christlikeness. He leads the Church into a right understanding and application of the truths of God's Word. He came to glorify the Son, Who in turn came to glorify the Father. *Genesis 1:2; Judges 14:6; Psalms 51:11; 139:7ff.; Isaiah 61:1-3; Joel 2:28-32; Matthew 1:18; 3:16; 4:1; 12:28-32; 28:19; Mark 1:10,12; Luke 1:35; 4:1,18-19; 11:13; 12:12; 24:49; John 4:24; 14:16-17,26; 15:26; 16:7-14; 20:22; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4,38; 4:31; 5:3-4; 6:3; 7:55; 8:17,28,39; 10:44; 11:16-17; 13:2,4; 15:28; 16:6; 19:1-6; Romans 8:9-11,14-16,26-27; 1 Corinthians 2:10-14; 3:16; 6:19; 12:3-11,13; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 5:5; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30; 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; 1 Timothy 3:16; 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:14; Hebrews 9:8,14; 2 Peter 1:21; 1 John 4:13; 5:6-8; Revelation 1:10; 22:17.*

SECTION 3.C. HUMANITY. Humanity is the special creation of God, made in His own image. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation, that they might have fellowship with Him. In the beginning humans were innocent of sin and were endowed by their Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice Adam rebelled against God, bringing sin into the human race. As a consequence of Adam's sin, all human beings are estranged from their Maker, yet are still responsible to Him. All people are lost and without hope apart from salvation in Christ. Nevertheless, because they still possess the divine image, every person of every race has full dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love. All humanity is subject to divine wrath, inwardly depraved and, apart from a special work of grace, utterly incapable of returning to God. *Genesis 1:26-30; 2:7,18-22; 3:1-24; 9:6; Psalms 1:1-6; 8:3-6; 32:1-5; 51:5; Isaiah 6:5; Jeremiah 17:5; Matthew 16:26; Acts 17:26-31; Romans 1:19-32; 3:10-18,23; 5:6,12,19; 6:6; 7:14-25; 8:12-18; 8:29-30; 1 Corinthians 1:21-31; 15:19,21-22; Ephesians 2:1-22; Colossians 1:21-22; 3:9-11.*

SECTION 3.D. SALVATION. Salvation involves the redemption of the whole person and is offered freely to all who receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. In its broadest sense salvation includes election, regeneration, justification, sanctification, perseverance and glorification. There is no salvation apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord. *Genesis 3:15; Exodus 3:14-17; 6:2-8; Matthew 1:21; 4:17; 16:21-26; 27:22-28:6; Luke 1:68-69; 2:28-32; John 1:29; 3:3-21,36; 5:24; 10:9; Acts 2:21; 4:12; 15:11; 16:30-31; Romans 1:16; 10:9-10,13; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-22; Colossians 1:9-22; Hebrews 5:8-9; 9:24-28.*

1. **Election** is the gracious purpose of God, settled before the foundation of the world, as the basis on which He regenerates, justifies, sanctifies and glorifies sinners. Election is consistent with the free agency of human beings and is the glorious display of God's sovereign goodness. It excludes boasting and promotes humility. *Genesis 12:1-3; Exodus 19:5-8; Matthew 21:28-45; 24:22,31; 25:34; John 6:44-45,65; 15:16; 17:6; Romans 8:29-30; 11:5-7,26-36; Ephesians 1:4-14; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 1 Peter 1:2; 2:4-10.*
2. **Regeneration**, or the new birth, is the work of God's grace whereby believers become new creatures in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit's work in regeneration is not the result of water baptism or of any outward ritual. It is a change of heart brought about by the Holy Spirit

through conviction of sin, in which sinners respond in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Repentance is a genuine turning from sin toward God. And true biblical faith means more than simply believing certain facts. It means accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and committing one's entire being to Him as Lord. It calls for a total response involving the believer's mind, emotions and will. *Jeremiah 31:31ff.; Ezekiel 11:19; John 1:12-14; 3:3ff.; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Eph. 2:1-10; 3:1-11; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3.*

3. **Justification** is the act of God by which He declares righteous those who, through faith in Christ, repent of their sins and confess Him as Lord. It is granted apart from any human virtue or good works and involves the imputation of our sins to Christ and of His righteousness to us. *Genesis 15:6; Luke 24:44-48; John 3:16; 5:24; Acts 13:39; Rom. 1:17; 3:21-28; 4:1-25; 5:1, 8-10; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:24.*
4. **Sanctification** is the ongoing experience, beginning with regeneration, by which believers are set apart for God's purposes and are enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the power of the Holy Spirit Who dwells in them. Growth in grace should continue throughout the believer's life. *John 17:17,19; Acts 20:32; Romans 6:1-23; 8:1-17; 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 6:19-20; Galatians 2:20; 5:22-25; Ephesians 4:11-16; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:1ff.; 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; Titus 2:11-14; Hebrews 12:14; James 2:14-26; 1 Peter 1:13-16, 22; 1 John 1:6-2:11.*
5. **Perseverance** to endure to the end is promised to all true believers. Those whom God has accepted in Christ and sanctified by His Spirit will never fall away from the state of grace, but will persevere to the very end of their earthly lives. Believers may fall into sin through neglect and temptation, thereby grieving the Spirit, bringing reproach to the cause of Christ and coming under the Lord's discipline. Nevertheless, God's promise is sure: He who began the work of salvation will be faithful to see it through to completion. *John 10:27-29; Romans 8:28-39; Philippians 1:6; 2 Timothy 1:12; 2:10, 19; Hebrews 11:39-12:2; James 1:12; 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 2:19.*
6. **Glorification** is the culmination of salvation and is the final blessed state of the redeemed as they abide in God's presence for all eternity. *Matthew 13:43; Romans 8:18-23, 30; 2 Corinthians 4:17; Ephesians 1:18; Philippians 3:21; Colossians 3:4; 2 Timothy 1:10; 1 Peter 5:1; 1 John 3:2.*

SECTION 3.E. THE CHURCH. All who come to Jesus Christ in faith are immediately placed by the Holy Spirit into one united spiritual body, the church, the bride of Christ, of which Christ is the Head. The Father by His Word and Spirit creates the church, calling sinful people into the fellowship of Christ's body. And by the same Word and Spirit, He guides and preserves that new redeemed humanity.

The universal church is not a religious institution or denomination. Rather, it is made up of all those who have become genuine followers of Jesus Christ. The church exists to worship and glorify God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It also exists to serve Him by faithfully doing His will on earth. This involves a commitment to see the Gospel preached and churches multiplying throughout the world. The ultimate mission of the church is the making of disciples through the preaching of the Gospel. As God transforms human nature, this then becomes the chief means of society's transformation. Upon conversion, newly redeemed men and women should, through baptism, enter into the fellowship of a local church in which they devote themselves to learning, fellowship, the Lord's Supper and prayer. In this context they are called to live out the New Covenant as the people of God and demonstrate the reality of the Kingdom of God. The church's members are to work together in love and unity, exercising their spiritual gifts, intent on fulfilling the ultimate purpose of glorifying Christ.

Matthew 16:18; 18:17; 28:18-20; Acts 2:41-47; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13; 14:26; Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:11-16; 5:23; 1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

SECTION 3.F. ANGELS. Angels are created beings and are therefore not to be worshiped. Although they are a higher order of creation than humanity, they are created to serve God, to worship Him and to care for those who will inherit salvation.

Satan, originally the greatest of the angels, rebelled against God, taking with him a host of angels (also referred to in Scripture as demons). He was cast out of God's presence and, as a usurper of God's authority, he established a counter-kingdom of darkness and evil. He is the "father of lies" and the great deceiver. Therefore Satan is the open and declared enemy of God and of humanity. He is the prince of this world who has been defeated through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although he presently controls all the powers of darkness, he will be punished eternally in the lake of fire.

Genesis 3:1-15; Job 1:6-7; Isaiah 14:12-17; Ezekiel 28:11-19; Matthew 4:1-11; 25:41; Luke 2:9-14; 10:18; John 10:10; 12:31; 16:11; Romans 16:20; 2 Corinthians 4:3-4; Ephesians 6:10-17; Colossians 2:15; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Timothy 3:7; 2 Timothy 2:26; Hebrews 1:6-7,14; 2:6-7,14; 1 Peter 5:8-9; Revelation 5:11-14; 12:1-14; 19:10; 20:2,10.

SECTION 3.G. THE RETURN OF CHRIST. At a time known only to God, Jesus Christ will descend from heaven, and all believers – both those who have died in Christ and those who are still alive – will meet Him in the air. This hope produces in us a sense of constant expectancy and motivates us to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

Every human being who has ever lived will one day be raised bodily from the dead. In judgment and condemnation, unbelievers will be consigned to eternal conscious punishment in hell, while believers will enter into eternal blessedness and joy. In the new heaven and the new earth, Christ's Kingdom will come to full fruition as the redeemed, in gloriously renewed bodies, dwell with Him forever, serving Him, reigning with Him and giving Him unending praise and glory.

Isaiah 2:4; 11:9; Matthew 8:12; 10:28; 13:49-50; 16:27; 18:8-9; 19:28; 24:27,30,36,44; 25:34; 26:64; Mark 8:38; 9:43-48; Luke 12:5,40,48; 16:19-26; 17:22-37; 21:27-28; 23:42; John 14:1-3; Acts 1:11; 17:31; Romans 14:10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; 15:24-28,35-58; 2 Corinthians 5:1,8,10; Philippians 1:23; 3:20-21; Colossians 1:5; 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:1ff.; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9; 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 6:14; 2 Timothy 4:1,8; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 9:27-28; James 5:8; 2 Peter 3:7-13; 1 John 2:28; 3:2; Jude 6-7,14; Revelation 1:8; 2:7; 3:11; 19:16; 20:1-22:13.

SECTION 3.H. MARRIAGE, GENDER AND SEXUALITY. We believe that God wonderfully and immutably creates each person as male or female. These two distinct, complementary genders together reflect the image and nature of God (*Gen 1:26-27*). Rejection of one's biological sex is a rejection of the image of God within that person.

We believe that the word "marriage" has only one meaning: the uniting of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union, as delineated in Scripture (*Gen 2:18-25*). We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to occur only between a man and a woman who are married to each other. *1 Cor 6:18; 7:2-5; Heb 13:4*

We believe that any form of sexual immorality (including adultery, fornication, homosexual behavior, bisexual conduct, bestiality, incest and the use of pornography) is sinful and offensive to God. *Matt 15:18-20; 1 Cor 6:9-10*

We believe that in order to preserve the function and integrity of Village Bible Church as a local Body of Christ and to provide a biblical role model for both our own church members and the community, it is imperative that all members agree to and abide by this statement on Marriage, Gender and Sexuality, which is further developed in our distinctive entitled *Marriage and Human Sexuality*. *Matt 5:16; Phil 2:14-16; 1 Thess 5:22*

Because God has ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and Himself, our church will recognize only marriages between a biological man and a biological woman. Pastors, elders and staff members will participate in weddings and solemnize only marriages between one man and one woman. Additionally, the facilities and property of our church will host only weddings between one man and one woman.

We believe that God offers redemption and restoration to all who confess and forsake their sin, seeking His mercy and forgiveness through Jesus Christ. *Acts 3:19-21; Rom 10:9-10; 1 Cor 6:9-11*

We believe that every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect and dignity. *Mark 12:28-31; Luke 6:31*

This position is further developed in our distinctives entitled *Christian Life* and *Biblical Sexual Morality*.

SECTION 3.I. SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE. We believe that all human life 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. We are therefore called to defend, protect and value all human life (*Ps 139*). This position is further developed in our distinctives entitled *Christian Life and Sanctity of Life*.

SECTION 3.J. THE FINAL AUTHORITY FOR MATTERS OF BELIEF AND CONDUCT. This statement of faith does not exhaust the extent of our beliefs. The Bible itself, as the inspired and infallible Word of God, speaks with final authority concerning truth, morality and the proper conduct of mankind and is the sole and final source of all that we believe.

The Guiding Elders, in light of the responsibility assigned to them by both Scripture and this Constitution, are entrusted with the spiritual oversight of the church and bear the final responsibility for the church in the interpretation of Scripture, the meaning of the content of this Article and all other matters relating to spiritual oversight.

ARTICLE IV **THE ORDINANCES**

Village Bible Church recognizes two ordinances that the church is to practice until Christ returns – believer’s baptism and the Lord’s Supper. An ordinance is a symbolic act commanded by Christ to signify what He did to effect our salvation from sin. These ordinances are not to be regarded as means of salvation or as means of grace by which special merit is obtained. Both, however, give us opportunities to draw closer to God and to experience His grace in fresh ways.

SECTION 4.A. BELIEVER’S BAPTISM. We believe that baptism is an ordinance of the Lord through which those who have repented and come to faith express their union with Christ in His death and resurrection, by being immersed in water in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of belonging to the people of God and an emblem of burial and cleansing, signifying the transition of the individual from the old life to new life in Christ. Old allegiances are forsaken in order that new allegiances with Christ and His people can be formed. The believer gives testimony to this spiritual transition through baptism. By submitting to baptism, a person publicly joins with the church in its confession that “Jesus is Lord.”

We believe that the New Testament both teaches and demonstrates that baptism is to be administered by immersing a believer in water. We therefore regard all other approaches to baptism as being out of keeping with what is taught in the New Testament. Yet, while not taking these differences lightly, we would not elevate them to the level of what is essential to authentic Christianity. Thus, Christians who have not been baptized by immersion as believers, but were baptized by some other method and/or were baptized before they believed, may under certain circumstances become members of this church.

Matthew 3:13-17; 28:19-20; Mark 1:9-11; 14:22-26; Luke 3:21-22; John 3:23; Acts 2:38-42, 8:36-39, 16:30-33; Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:12.

SECTION 4.B. THE LORD'S SUPPER. Unlike baptism, which is a one-time event, the Lord's Supper, known also as the Lord's Table or communion, is a practice meant to be observed over and over again throughout the life of a Christian. It is a holy time of worship when we come together as a body to remember and celebrate what Christ did for us. Ever since Jesus instituted this practice at the Last Supper, it has served as a beautiful reminder of the sacrifice of His body and the shedding of His blood on our behalf. It is a sign of our continued participation in the atoning benefits of Christ's death. As we participate in the Lord's Supper, we remember and proclaim the death of Christ and signify our unity with other members of Christ's body. In addition, when we approach the Lord's Table in faith, accompanied by self-examination, we receive spiritual nourishment for our souls.

We believe that in New Testament times, new believers participated in the Lord's Supper only after having taken the initial step of obedience and discipleship commanded by Christ by publicly identifying themselves with Him through the waters of baptism (*Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38-42*). It was their baptism that marked them as members of the body of Christ (*1 Corinthians 12:13*), and it was the members of that one body who symbolically participated in the body and blood of Christ by means of the Lord's Supper (*1 Corinthians 10:16-17*).

Nevertheless, while this is our conviction, we recognize that not all genuine believers have the same understanding with regard to the New Testament's teaching about who may participate in the Lord's Supper. And because we do not wish to create division in the body of Christ, it is not our policy to exclude from the Lord's Table those believers whose understanding is different from ours.

When we gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper, the elders will regularly admonish those who are present to examine their hearts and lives before participating, confirming that they are walking in fellowship with and in obedience to Christ. The ways the New Testament speaks of walking in fellowship and obedience include:

1. Having submitted oneself to the lordship of Christ by turning to Him as Savior and Lord.
2. Having taken the first step of obedience and discipleship commanded by Christ by publicly identifying with Him through the waters of baptism.
3. Having confessed any recent sins and renewing one's commitment to live for Him.
4. Harboring no resentment or other ill feelings toward others, inasmuch as the New Testament teaches that those who have been forgiven are themselves to extend forgiveness.

If you find yourself out of fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ at the time the Lord's Supper is being shared, we would encourage you to repent and make right your wrong before participating – or, if that is not possible, to abstain from participating and then going and making right your wrong.

Matthew 6:12; 26:26-30; 28:19-20; Luke 22:19-20; Acts 2:38-42; Romans 10:9-13; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, 21; 11:23-28, 12:13; 1 John 1:9.

ARTICLE V

MEMBERSHIP

SECTION 5.A. PURPOSE OF MEMBERSHIP. While all believers are part of the universal church, the New Testament stresses the importance of all believers also being part of a local church. A local church is comprised of a definable group of people who, on the basis of their commitment to the Lord, have identified themselves with and committed themselves to one another. While membership in a local church does not guarantee one's salvation, it is imperative for all believers to be connected to a local body of believers for the purposes of mutual encouragement, edification and equipping.

While church membership gives believers certain rights within a local congregation, this is by no means its primary purpose. In the God-ordained environment of a local church, members function as one body, building up each other in love according to the rule of Scripture. Throughout Scripture, it is clear that God intended for His people to enter into covenants with Him and with one another. Membership at Village Bible Church is a covenant relationship among fellow believers, as well as with their leaders, under Christ. In order to implement the principles of accountability and commitment to the local body of Christ as defined in the New Testament and practiced in the early church, Village Bible Church recognizes the need for formal membership.

Acts 2:47, Acts 6:3; Acts 11:26; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 8:1; Philippians 1:1; Philippians 2:2; Hebrews 13:17

SECTION 5.B. QUALIFICATIONS FOR MEMBERSHIP. Those who give testimony and evidence of their faith in Christ as their Savior and Lord, who have been baptized, who affirm their commitment to follow the Word of God in all matters of faith and practice, who affirm the Village Bible Church *Statement of Doctrine* and *Membership Commitments* and who voluntarily submit themselves to the authority of Village Bible Church are eligible to apply for membership. The minimum age for membership is 14.

SECTION 5.C. MEMBERSHIP COMMITMENTS. Village Bible Church, as part of the visible body of Christ, acknowledges our God-ordained relationship as a local fellowship of believers. We agree to committed relationships expressed in dependence upon, responsibility for and

accountability to each other by God's grace. These relationships will be guided and governed by the biblical principles set forth in our *Membership Commitments*, which relate to peacemaking and reconciliation, accountability and church discipline, the preservation of marriages, counseling and confidentiality and the protection of our children. We therefore commit ourselves to one another through the annual reaffirmation of our *Membership Commitments*.

SECTION 5.D. PROCESS FOR MEMBERSHIP. Anyone who desires to become a member of Village Bible Church and meets the qualifications set forth above is invited to take the following steps:

1. Complete the introductory membership class.
2. Submit an application to the elders.
3. Read the *Statement of Doctrine* and *Membership Commitments* of this church and commit by signature to live in accordance with them.
4. Display evidence of a maturing, active love relationship with Jesus.
5. Declare a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and express a clear understanding of the responsibilities of membership in the presence of a team of at least one elder and another member of the church.

After having been approved by the Campus Pastor, new members will be introduced at their campus and publicly welcomed into the fellowship of the church.

SECTION 5.E. MAINTENANCE OF MEMBERSHIP. Those who have been received in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution, attend regularly and have affirmed and signed the *Membership Commitments* for the current year will be considered active members at the campus where they attend regularly and turn in their *Membership Commitments*.

1. As the elders shepherd the flock, they will maintain the integrity of the membership roll.
2. One's ongoing membership status will be maintained through:
 - a. Annual signature reaffirmation of the *Membership Commitments*: Every year, the *Membership Commitments* will be presented to all members for reaffirmation. Members who do not reaffirm the Commitments in writing within 90 days will be removed from the membership roll.
 - b. Compliance with the *Membership Commitments*: The Campus Pastors, in conjunction with the Shepherding Elders, have the responsibility to review the status of those who fail to live in accordance with the *Membership Commitments* and, when appropriate, to remove them from membership.

- c. Regular church involvement: Those who have been absent from the church for a period of six (6) months without a satisfactory reason will be removed from the membership roll.
3. Reinstatement: At any time, anyone whose membership has lapsed due to absence or a failure to affirm the *Membership Commitments* can sign and submit a new *Membership Commitments* form and make a request of the elders that they be reinstated as a member.
4. Under special circumstances, the Campus Pastor may grant continued membership to individuals who are unable to attend regularly or affirm their membership in person because of life circumstances (e.g., students, military personnel, shut-ins and missionaries).

SECTION 5.F. WITHDRAWAL FROM MEMBERSHIP.

1. One may withdraw from membership at any time simply by notifying the church in writing of such intent.
2. The church need not accept a member's resignation, however, if the elders believe that the purpose of his or her resignation is to avoid church discipline. Although it may be that church discipline will result in the public dismissal of the erring member, that will be the decision of the Guiding Elder Team and not of the erring member who has accepted the accountability inherent in church membership.

SECTION 5.G. DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS. The church is a body of Christian believers who hold certain beliefs and standards in common. On occasion, individuals in the church may conduct themselves in a manner contrary to biblical standards and the church's corresponding *Statement of Doctrine* and *Membership Commitments*. It shall be a high priority for the church to restore such persons to conformity with the fellowship through church discipline as outlined in scripture. Church discipline will be carried out by the Guiding Elder Team in accordance with our *Membership Commitments* guidelines.

ARTICLE VI

GOVERNMENT & LEADERSHIP

SECTION 6.A. FORM OF GOVERNMENT. The New Testament Scriptures give examples of local churches being led by a plurality of godly men called elders. These elders functioned as members of teams, rather than as individuals, in directing the affairs of local congregations. Elders in New Testament times served as the spiritual leaders of their congregation and were given ultimate authority and the responsibility to ensure that their church remained on a biblical course and that its mission was carried out.

Elders were selected on the basis of specific moral and personal criteria. While the Scriptures do not go into great detail regarding the various responsibilities and functions of elders, they do enumerate the essential qualifications for this office and provide us with at least a basic framework of what it means to be an elder.

In light of this biblical teaching, Village Bible Church is led by elders who focus their efforts on meeting the needs of individual members and the corporate needs of the church. They are assisted by Ministry Directors (deacons or deaconesses).

Certain elders also serve on the Guiding Elder Team, which makes decisions concerning the overall course of the ministry of Village Bible Church. The members of this team, in accordance with the laws of the State of Illinois, serve as the trustees of the church and constitute the oversight board for all matters of spiritual, financial and legal services rendered on behalf of the church. For corporate purposes, the Guiding Elder Team is the board of directors of the church.

SECTION 6.B. THE MINISTRY OF ELDERS. *1 Peter 5:2: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve.*

1. **Terminology:** The words “elder,” “overseer” and “pastor” are used interchangeably in the New Testament with reference to a single office. *Acts 14:23; 20:17,28; Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1; 5:17; Titus 1:5,7; 1 Peter 5:1-4*

2. **Qualifications:** Elders must be active members of this church and also meet and abide by the qualifications set forth in Scripture. They are to be men who exhibit the following traits:

- Able to teach
- Above reproach
- Husband of one wife
- Not addicted to alcohol
- Temperate
- Prudent
- Not violent
- Respectable
- Patient
- Not antagonistic
- Hospitable
- Manages his household well
- Not a new convert
- Free from the love of money

Acts 20:17, 28-30; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4.

3. **Implementation:** All elders will be called to fulfill the biblical mandate of shepherding the flock at their local campus. Some elders will also be called to serve across all campuses on the Guiding Elder Team.

4. **Changes:** Members will be notified of any changes in the composition of the elder teams.

5. **Functions:**

a. **Guiding Elders:** Paul, in his first letter to Timothy, makes reference to “the elders who direct the affairs of the church” (5:17). The meaning of the Greek word

translated “direct” is “to preside over” or “govern.” As a church grows, it seems appropriate and even necessary for there to be a group of elders who focus particularly on the affairs and spiritual health of the church as a whole. In our model, some elders, in addition to shepherding the members of a local flock, also exercise a governing function on a team we call the Guiding Elder Team. Ordinarily, this team should consist of a minimum of five (5) to a maximum of ten (10) men. Based on their areas of oversight, the Lead Pastor and Executive Pastor will serve on this team. The remaining Guiding Elders will be chosen from among the non-staff members of the Full Body of Elders.

In addition to their various roles as Shepherding Elders, those who function in the role of Guiding Elder serve the church body in the following ways:

- 1) ***Governance***: Ultimate decision-making authority resides with the Guiding Elder Team, which has been entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing the overall ministry of this church.
- 2) ***Equality and plurality***: While Guiding Elders may differ in giftedness, spiritual maturity, training and biblical knowledge, they all have equal authority and responsibility.
- 3) ***Decision-making by consensus***: It is the responsibility of the Guiding Elders to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. Since we believe the Holy Spirit will lead us in unity, decision-making will normally take place through consensus and not through a voting process, unless otherwise noted in this Constitution. Where agreement among the Guiding Elders is not obvious, decisions may be postponed or proposals may be reevaluated, modified or withdrawn. Consensus is defined as “total agreement by the elders to support a decision.” No Guiding Elder has veto power, however, and in certain instances, an individual member of the Guiding Elder Team may need to defer to the collective decision of the remaining Guiding Elders.
 - a) **Meetings**: Meetings will be held on a regular basis as determined by the Guiding Elders. Notice for such meetings shall be pursuant to the provisions in Article VI, Section 6.H.3.
 - b) **Changes**: Members will be notified of any changes in the composition of the Guiding Elder Team.
- 4) ***Guidance and Envisioning***: The Guiding Elder Team is charged with discerning the values and vision that guide the overall ministry of Village

Bible Church and with formulating goals and strategies that will facilitate the carrying out of that vision. Scripture reminds us in *Proverbs 11:14* that “where there is no guidance, the people fall.” Following are some of the ways the Guiding Elders are to carry out this responsibility:

- a) Through prayer and study of the Scriptures they are to seek direction and guidance from the Holy Spirit.
 - b) They oversee the staff and the implementation of the vision, goals, doctrine and values of the church.
 - c) They have the responsibility of communicating matters of importance to the body.
 - d) Interaction and communication between the Guiding Elders and the staff should reflect recognition of and respect for the staff organizational chart.
- 5) ***Direction:*** The Guiding Elder Team ensures that the direction of the church is consistent with its statements of faith and purpose. It guides the life of the church. *1 Timothy 3:8-12; 5:17a*
- a) The Guiding Elder Team oversees the nominating process for members of the Shepherding Elder Team.
 - b) The Guiding Elder Team reviews and approves the annual ministry budget to ensure that it is in line with the mission, vision and strategic emphases that have been agreed upon for the coming year. The Lead Pastor and the Executive Pastor will recuse themselves from the final decision regarding compensation for their personal positions.
 - c) The Guiding Elder Team is responsible for keeping the Full Body of Elders informed about the overall affairs and direction of the church.
- 6) ***Discipline:*** Church discipline is administered under the oversight of the Guiding Elder Team, in conjunction with the campus shepherding elders.
- b. **Shepherding Elders:** Shepherding is a specific and vital responsibility of those who accept the call to become elders. The number of elders will be as many as are qualified and needed to carry out the ministry of elders at each campus, as

determined by the Guiding Elder Team. Shepherding elders serve the church family by:

- 1) **Relating:** Elders should purposefully seek to build relationships with people both in the church and in the community. It is important that elders and those whom they guide know one another. In keeping with the biblical analogy of the shepherd and his sheep, elders must be recognizable, approachable, steadfast and trustworthy. They should interact with people at the natural points of contact afforded by our church structure.
- 2) **Feeding:** Elders should challenge those whom they shepherd to move into a deeper and more personal relationship with Jesus. Because elders can be personally involved in the lives of those who call Village Bible Church their church home, they are able to help ensure that needed spiritual sustenance is available. *Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2*
- 3) **Instructing and leading by example:** Elders should equip and edify the church by teaching and/or preaching the Word of God, while at the same time modeling godly living. *Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 4:12, 5:17b; 2 Timothy 4:1-2; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3*
- 4) **Encouraging through correct teaching:** Elders should encourage the members of the flock to remain consistent and to grow in their relationship with the Lord. *Titus 1:9*
- 5) **Discipling and counseling:** Elders should develop one-on-one relationships with the flock, providing discipleship, mentoring and counseling. *2 Timothy 2:2*
- 6) **Mediating:** Elders are to be thoughtful leaders, always ready to give an appropriate response when encountering discord or division in the church. When there is conflict, someone who is known and respected can help to resolve that conflict. This is a natural function of elders, given the personal relationships that typically develop between elders and those they lead.
- 7) **Caring and praying:** Elders are to care for the spiritual well-being of members and regularly pray for and with the sick. They should give spiritual comfort during trials and pray with and for those who are part of the flock. *1 Samuel 12:23; Romans 1:19; 2 Corinthians 1:3-7; Ephesians 1:15-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-12; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; James 5:14-16*
- 8) **Advising:** Elders should offer objective biblical guidance with regard to conflicts, distortions in thinking and difficult decisions. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

- 9) **Unifying:** Elders are responsible for fostering and maintaining unity *within* the church. This is in accordance with the high priestly prayer of Jesus as recorded in *John 17*.
- 10) **Protecting:** Elders are to guard the body against harmful influences, confronting those who are contradicting biblical truth or are following patterns of sinful behavior. They should warn the sheep of danger and discipline them in love and humility when they become rebellious, following the processes of church discipline outlined in Scripture and in our *Membership Commitments*. *Matthew 18:15-20; Acts 20:28-31; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Galatians 6:1-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 1 Timothy 5:17-25; 6:20; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9; 3:10; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-5*
- 11) **Being accountable:**
 - a) **To God:** Elders have a responsibility for the souls of their flock and will give an account before God. *Hebrews 13:17*
 - b) **To one another:** In the New Testament elders are exhorted to maintain accountability among themselves. All spiritual leaders in this church should hold each other accountable for their spiritual lives, their doctrine and the way they carry out their ministries. *Acts 20:28-30*
- c. **The Full Body of Elders:** All Guiding Elders and Shepherding Elders together comprise the Full Body of Elders. Meetings of the Full Body of Elders are for the purpose of equipping, encouraging and communicating the shepherding needs and vision of the church body.

The Full Body of Elders meets at least twice a year. In addition, special meetings of the Full Body of Elders can be called whenever direction and wisdom are needed regarding significant matters. Notices shall be given pursuant to the provisions set forth in Article VI, Section 6.H.4.

SECTION 6.C. SELECTION OF ELDERS.

1. **Selection:** The Scriptures indicate that the first elders were appointed under the authority of the apostles. No specific guidelines are given in the New Testament, however, as to how they were to be selected in the future. Therefore, local churches are free to develop a process that will best serve their own needs. When additional elders are needed, the following process will be followed. *Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5*

a. **Guiding Elders:**

- 1) Additions to the Guiding Elder Team will be made from among men currently serving as Shepherding Elders.
- 2) When there are openings on the Guiding Elder Team, the Team will accept nominations from the Full Body of Elders. An elder cannot nominate himself.
- 3) Ordinarily, the Guiding Elder Team should consist of five to ten men. Based on their areas of oversight, the Lead Pastor and Executive Pastor will serve on this team. The remaining Guiding Elders will be chosen from among the non-staff members of the Full Body of Elders.
- 4) Vote of Affirmation of Guiding Elders: The Guiding Elder Team will prayerfully consider all nominations submitted. At the end of this process, if the Guiding Elder Team decides to proceed, it will affirm that decision through a vote of affirmation of the Guiding Elders, held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.2b. of this Constitution
- 5) Vote of Affirmation of the Full Body of Elders: If the Guiding Elder Team affirms a candidate, they will then present that candidate to the Full Body of Elders for a vote of affirmation, held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.3. of this Constitution.
- 6) The Chairman (President), Vice-Chairman (Vice-President) and Secretary of the Guiding Elder Team will be selected annually through the consensus decision of the Guiding Elder Team. These roles are not to be filled by the Lead Pastor, Executive Pastor or other staff elder.

b. **Shepherding Elders:**

- 1) Nominations will be accepted by the Guiding Elder Team from other elders and from members of the congregation.
- 2) The Guiding Elder Team will prayerfully oversee the examination process to determine if a potential elder:
 - a) aspires to the office (*1 Timothy 3:1*);
 - b) is above reproach in all areas of his life (*1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9*);
 - c) meets the biblical qualifications laid out in Article VI, Section 6.B.2.;

- d) affirms his agreement with the Statement of Doctrine and Constitution of this church and demonstrates competency in the area of biblical doctrine (*Titus 1: 9*);
 - e) demonstrates the heart and ability to shepherd the flock and to serve alongside the existing elders (*Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3*).
- 3) The name of anyone whom the Guiding Elder Team desires to add as a Shepherding Elder will be made known to the members of the local campus where he will serve. Members will be reminded of the biblical requirements for elders and will be given 30 days to speak personally with the nominee(s), should they wish to express their concern about any potentially disqualifying factors. If their concern is not resolved, they should then approach a member of the Guiding Elder Team and share that concern.
- 4) *Votes of Affirmation:*
- a) Vote of Affirmation of the Guiding Elders: The Guiding Elder Team will prayerfully consider all nominations submitted. At the end of this process, if the Guiding Elder Team decides to proceed, it will affirm that decision through a vote of affirmation of the Guiding Elders, held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.2b. of this Constitution.
 - b) Vote of Affirmation of the Full Body of Elders: If the Guiding Elder Team affirms a candidate, they will then present that candidate to the Full Body of Elders for a vote of affirmation, held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.3. of this Constitution.
 - c) Vote of Affirmation of the Members: If the Guiding Elder Team and the Full Body of Elders affirm a candidate, the Guiding Elder Team will present the candidate to the members of his campus for a vote of affirmation, held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.3. of this Constitution.

2. **Term:**

- a. Shepherding elders serve indefinitely.
- b. The Lead Pastor and Executive Pastor each serve indefinitely as both a Shepherding Elder and a Guiding Elder.

- c. Campus Pastors serve indefinitely as the leader of their campus Shepherding Elder Team.
- d. **Guiding Elders:**
 - 1) Except for the Lead Pastor and Executive Pastor (see Article VI, Section 6.C.2.d.), Guiding Elders serve for a three-year term.
 - 2) At the end of his term, the Guiding Elder Team will review a Guiding Elder's service and decide whether or not to invite him to serve for another term. Those elders renewing their commitment will be presented to the Full Body of Elders for a vote of reaffirmation.
 - 3) There are no term limits for Guiding Elders.

SECTION 6.D. STAFF.

The church staff shall normally consist of a Lead Pastor, an Executive Pastor, and Campus Pastors, as well as other pastors, ministry staff and administrative staff. In addition to qualifications for their specific assignments, they shall have demonstrated appropriate Christian character and values as determined by the Guiding Elder Team.

1. Role & Duties.

- a. **Lead Pastor:** The Lead Pastor provides visionary and spiritual direction for Village Bible Church across our multiple campuses, with an emphasis on the overall leadership, direction and teaching ministries of the church. In conjunction with the Guiding Elder Team, he oversees the execution of the church's overall vision and direction. He helps to define strategic goals and vision as a key leader among the staff members and elders and assists the staff in developing new ministry programs, as directed by the Holy Spirit, so that everyone in leadership is appropriately responsive to the church's overall needs and well-being. His key responsibilities include but are not limited to:
 - 1) **Guiding Elder:** Serving as a permanent Guiding Elder while in office, bringing passion, vision and direction to the team.
 - 2) **Overall leadership:** Serving as an ex-officio member of all church bodies, including standing subcommittees.
 - 3) **Agent of unity:** Serving as the church's intentional agent of unity across all campuses.

- 4) **Vision casting, goal setting and evaluation:** Working with the Guiding Elders to develop and implement ministry plans for the church and its campuses, ensuring that the ministry of Village Bible Church is fulfilling its defined mission and reflecting its core values through ongoing evaluation of ministry programs and staff.
 - 5) **Preaching and teaching ministry:** Through his preaching and teaching ministry, he will promote and enhance the corporate worship of God and knowledge of sound doctrine. He should instruct the congregation from the Scriptures on such matters as the practice of personal holiness, the fellowship of believers, the strengthening of Christian families, evangelism, world missions and how believers ought to conduct themselves in everyday life.
 - 6) **Church-wide preaching ministry leadership:** Overseeing the preaching ministry (strategy and execution) of all campuses, developing the preaching schedules and rotating the members of the pastoral team to the other campuses.
 - 7) **Shepherding and supervising the Campus Pastors.**
- b. **Executive Pastor:** The Executive Pastor serves across our multiple campuses, with an emphasis on overall administration and leadership and the development of the ministries of Village Bible Church, so that they fulfill its defined mission and reflect its core values. The Executive Pastor leads the Catalyst Services Team, which provides leadership and support services to all campuses. In partnership with the Lead Pastor, the Executive Pastor shepherds and supervises the Campus Pastors, assisting them and being a resource to them. His key responsibilities include:
- 1) **Guiding Elder:** Serving as a permanent Guiding Elder while in office, bringing passion, vision and direction to the team.
 - 2) **Overall leadership:** Serving as an ex-officio member of all church bodies, including standing subcommittees.
 - 3) **Ensuring normal church operation** in the absence of the Lead Pastor.
 - 4) **Ensuring that the systems, practices, activities and policies of the church are responsibly and effectively carried out** in ways that fulfill the objectives and other principles established by the Guiding Elder Team.

- 5) **Catalyst Services Team:** Overseeing the catalyst services of the church by bringing unity and coordination to the key departments of missions, finance, staffing, systems and facilities, as well as practices and policies.
 - 6) **Shepherding and supervising the Campus Pastors.**
- c. **Campus Pastor:** The Campus Pastor is the point person for the ministry of Village Bible Church at his assigned campus, leading the implementation of ministries at the campus level. He teaches, establishes strategy, recruits leaders, champions ministry and works to assimilate people into small group connections and ministry involvement, while providing pastoral care and up-front leadership to the campus. He is responsible for the effectiveness of ministry at his assigned campus. His key responsibilities include but are not limited to:
- 1) **Shepherding:** Leading the campus Shepherding Elder team on which he also serves.
 - 2) **Ministry leadership:** Leading the ministry of his assigned campus, establishing strategy and supporting the other leaders as they carry out the overall direction set by the Lead Pastor and the Guiding Elder Team.
 - 3) **Visible leader and communicator:** Serving as the campus leader and communicator.
 - 4) **Accountability:** Collaborating with the campus staff to monitor budgets and metrics in order to achieve benchmarks for effectiveness and fruitfulness at his assigned campus.
 - 5) **Community connector:** Connecting with the local community and community leaders, representing Village and its vision beyond its walls in collaboration with the rest of the ministry leadership.
- d. **Other pastoral staff,** such as ministry-specific pastors, will often serve in a variety of roles.
- e. **Ministry staff:** The ministry staff shall consist of those serving vocationally in roles other than those listed above, such as ministry directors and administrative staff.
- 1) Staff must exemplify faithfulness and spiritual maturity and have a reputation for keeping confidences.
 - 2) Ministry descriptions will be established by the Campus Pastor in conjunction with the Executive Pastor in keeping with the giftedness of the individual.

SECTION 6.E. SELECTION OF STAFF.

1. Lead Pastor.

- a. The Guiding Elder Team will identify possible candidates for the Lead Pastor position and investigate their training, ministry experience and qualifications specific to the position.
- b. When a candidate is identified, he will be introduced to the Full Body of Elders for dialogue and interaction.
- c. Vote of affirmation:
 - 1) At the end of this process, if the Guiding Elder Team decides to proceed, it will present the candidate to the Full Body of Elders for a vote of affirmation.
 - 2) A vote of affirmation, held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.3. of this Constitution, will be required for approval.

2. Executive Pastor.

- a. The Guiding Elder Team will identify possible candidates for the Executive Pastor position and investigate their training, ministry experience and qualifications specific to the position.
- b. When a candidate is identified, he will be introduced to the Full Body of Elders for dialogue and interaction.
- c. Vote of affirmation:
 - 1) At the end of this process, if the Guiding Elder Team decides to proceed, it will present the candidate to the Full Body of Elders for a vote of affirmation.
 - 2) A vote of affirmation, held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.3. of this Constitution, will be required for approval.

3. Campus Pastors.

- a. The Guiding Elder Team will identify possible candidates for a Campus Pastor position and investigate their training, ministry experience and qualifications specific to the position.

- b. When a candidate is identified, he will be introduced to the Shepherding Elders at the campus where he would serve for dialogue and interaction.
- c. The Guiding Elders will bring the candidate before the members of the campus where he would serve for a time of dialogue and interaction.
- d. Vote of affirmation:
 - 1) At the end of this process, if the Guiding Elder Team decides to proceed, it will present the candidate to the members of the local campus where he would serve for a vote of affirmation.
 - 2) A vote of affirmation, held in accordance with Article IV, Section 6.I.1. of this Constitution, will be required for approval.
 - 3) If there are fewer than 40 members at the campus, the Guiding Elders will engage with the local campus on the candidate for the Campus Pastor. The Guiding Elders and any local Shepherding Elders will approve the final candidate for that campus.
 - 4) In the case of a church plant or the adoption of an existing church, the Campus Pastor will be approved by the Full Body of Elders.
- 4. **Other pastoral staff**: The Executive Pastor will hire all other pastoral staff in conjunction with the appropriate Campus Pastor, staff supervisors and/or lay leaders, as he determines.
- 5. **Ministry staff**: The Executive Pastor will hire all other ministry staff in conjunction with the appropriate staff supervisors and/or lay leaders, as he determines.

SECTION 6.F. MINISTRY DIRECTORS (DEACONS AND DEACONESES).

- 1. **Terminology**: At Village Bible Church those who serve in the roles of deacon or deaconess are referred to also as ministry directors. In the original Greek of the New Testament, the word translated “deacon” means “servant,” and ministry directors lead by serving. The New Testament qualifications for elders and deacons are essentially the same with regard to character, but they differ with regard to aptitude. While elders are to be men who are “able to teach,” ministry directors are to be individuals who are “proven as servants”. 1 Timothy 3:8-10,12
- 2. **Biblical Precedent**: In New Testament times, the elders of the church delegated to other qualified believers certain ministries of the church, and such assistants were often called deacons or deaconesses.

3. **Responsibilities:** Ministry directors serve at Village Bible Church by filling particular areas of need on behalf of the elders, freeing the elders to give greater priority to their biblical responsibilities. Under the supervision of the Campus Pastor or assigned staff member, each ministry director oversees a specific area of ministry within the church.
4. **Eligibility to Serve:** Men and women, both from the ministry staff and from the congregation at large, are eligible to serve as ministry directors. The number of ministry directors will be determined by the needs of the ministry.
5. **Qualifications:** Ministry directors are to be active members modeling spiritual virtue who stand alongside the elders and exhibit the following qualities (*1 Timothy 3:8-12*):
 - Worthy of respect
 - Dignified
 - Not controlled by alcohol
 - Above reproach
 - Temperate
 - Not pursuing dishonest gain
 - Not double-tongued
 - Faithful in marriage
 - Holding to the deep truths of faith
 - Proven as servants
 - Faithful in all things
 - Managing their household well
6. **Selection:** Ministry directors will be appointed and supervised by the Campus Pastor or assigned staff member.
7. **Term:** A ministry director's term of service shall be indefinite but may be discontinued at any time by his or her own decision or by a decision of the Guiding Elder Team, the Campus Pastor or the assigned staff supervisor.

SECTION 6.G. REMOVAL OF LEADERS.

Staff members, elders, ministry directors and other leaders are a great blessing to any healthy church. The relationship between the church and its leaders is vital to its effectiveness. While great care and caution are used to select leaders, regrettably we recognize that, there will be times in the life of the church when it is necessary to consider removing one who is serving in leadership. This could happen for a variety of reasons, including:

- The discovery of some biblical disqualification;
- Inability or persistent failure to perform the functions required;
- Unresolved doctrinal, philosophical or relational differences or conflict.

When there is apparent cause for removing someone from a position of leadership, it is imperative that the church respond appropriately. While every situation is different, we seek to follow the guidelines set forth in Scripture for confronting sin, resolving conflict and disciplining and restoring the erring individual. The following will guide our process.

1. **Guidelines.**

- a. The accused leader has the right to make a defense against the accusation, but will recuse himself or herself from otherwise participating in the review process, as directed by the Guiding Elder Team.
- b. Upon taking on leadership responsibilities, each leader must agree that should an accusation be made against their moral character or competence, they will abide by the ruling of the Guiding Elder Team.
- c. Accusations or criticisms against a leader will be received according to the principles laid out in *1 Timothy 5:19-20*. Should it become clear that the individual is guilty of an offense, the individual will be counseled, censured and, when appropriate, disciplined by the Guiding Elder Team, with the ultimate goal of restoration (*Galatians 6:1-2*). However, should the erring leader continue to sin or fall into grievous sin, that leader will be removed from their role by the Guiding Elder Team.

2. **Process for Removal or Leave of Absence.**

- a. **Guiding Elder Team-initiated removal:**
 - 1) The Guiding Elder Team reserves the right at any time to remove a leader or require them to take a leave of absence. The individual in question will place themselves under the direction of the Guiding Elder Team.
 - 2) If the vote pursuant to Article VI, Section 6.I.2. of the Guiding Elder Team results in a 50/50 tie, then the Full Body of Elders will make the decision by a simple majority vote of the Full Body of Elders. The decision of the Full Body of Elders is final and will be binding.
 - 3) In the event that the removal of a Guiding Elder is to be considered, the other Guiding Elders will present evidence for such removal of the Guiding Elder to the Full Body of Elders. The accused Guiding Elder will have the opportunity to present a defense to the Full Body of Elders prior to a vote. A simple majority vote of the Full Body of Elders will be binding.
- b. **Self-initiated leave of absence:** A leader may submit a request to the Guiding Elder Team at any time for a leave of absence.
- c. **Self-initiated resignation:** A leader may resign at any time by giving notice to the Guiding Elder Team. The Guiding Elders may accept a leader's resignation. However, if they believe that the purpose of the leader's resignation is to avoid

church discipline, the Guiding Elder Team has the discretion not to accept the resignation pending church disciplinary proceedings. Although it may be that church discipline will result in the public dismissal or other censure of the erring leader, that will be the decision of the Guiding Elder Team and not of the erring leader who has accepted the accountability inherent in church leadership.

d. *Member-initiated removal:*

- 1) Any church member who perceives that there may be a problem with a leader should be appropriately cautious before discussing it with anyone else – even with an elder. The following should be considered:
 - a) Concerns should be voiced only when there is compelling evidence that a problem truly exists.
 - b) Members should also recognize that the unwarranted investigation of a leader might seriously damage the leader’s credibility.
 - c) Legitimate concerns regarding a leader should be raised regardless of personal loyalty to that leader, the fear of strife within the church, personal insecurity or the fear of reprisal, and any such factors should not dissuade the church from investigating and removing a leader, if necessary.
- 2) If, after careful consideration of the above-mentioned points, a church member determines that it is necessary to address the perceived problem (*Matthew 18:15-17*):
 - a) He or she should approach the leader, following the steps of peacemaking and reconciliation prescribed in Scripture and laid forth in our Relational Commitments.
 - b) There are certain circumstances when approaching the offender is not only inappropriate but also unwise. In such situations, the offended member should not go to the offender but immediately to one of the elders.
 - c) If the individual acknowledges that a significant problem does indeed exist with regard to their leadership capabilities or agrees that they are biblically disqualified, they may step down voluntarily subject to the terms of Article VI, Section 6.G.1. and other provisions of this Constitution. Further investigation by the Guiding Elders, and possible discipline, will be considered by the Guiding Elders.
 - d) If the issue remains unresolved, the individual should approach a member of the Guiding Elder Team, which will investigate the

problem and, if necessary, suspend or remove the leader from their role according to the principles noted above under *Guiding Elder Team-initiated removal steps*.

SECTION 6.H. MEETINGS.

1. **Family forums**, structured and led by the local Campus Pastor and overseen by the Guiding Elders, will be held at least twice a year to facilitate communication between the congregation and the leadership. They may include ministry reports and financial updates, as well as any other pertinent information.

2. **Regular or special meetings of the membership.**
 - a. It is the right and responsibility of the Guiding Elder Team to call congregational and/or membership meetings. Special meetings may be called at any time.

 - b. Special meetings may be initiated at any time by the membership. A written request to call a meeting of the membership, clearly stating its purpose, signed by twenty-five percent of the entire church membership and presented to the chairman of the Guiding Elder Team, will require the Guiding Elder Team to call such a meeting.

 - c. The calling of such a meeting, regular or special, must be announced in one or more of three ways:
 - 1) at the morning service on two consecutive Sundays preceding the date of the meeting;

 - 2) by a written notice mailed to each member at least five business days prior to the meeting;

 - 3) by an electronic notice given to each member, with receipt confirmed, at least seven days prior to the meeting.

 - d. Records of these announcements must be kept with the regular minutes of the church.

 - e. A Guiding Elder will preside over any regular or special meeting, or he will assign the oversight to another elder.

 - f. Non-members may ordinarily attend special meetings, but without voice or vote. The Guiding Elder Team reserves the right, however, to restrict certain meetings to members only.

3. **Meetings of the Guiding Elders:** Meetings will be held on a regular basis as determined by the Guiding Elders.
 - a. Notice of such a meeting shall be given in accordance with the following:
 - 1) Notice: Notice shall be sent to each Guiding Elder at least four (4) business days prior to the meeting.
 - 2) Method: Notice may be either written or electronic and may be delivered by post, email, text or other method pre-determined by the Guiding Elders.
 - 3) Waiver of notice: A waiver, whether before or after the time of the event for which the notice is given, shall be deemed equivalent to the notice. Attendance of a person at a meeting shall constitute a waiver of notice of such meeting, except when the person attends a meeting for the express purpose of objecting at the beginning of the meeting, to the transaction of any business because the meeting is not lawfully called or convened.

4. **Meetings of the Full Body of Elders:** The Full Body of Elders meets at least twice a year. In addition, special meetings of the Full Body of Elders can be called whenever direction and wisdom are needed with regard to significant matters.
 - a. It is the right and responsibility of the Guiding Elder Team to call meetings of the Full Body of Elders. Special meetings may be called at any time.
 - b. A written request to call a special meeting of the Full Body of Elders, clearly stating its purpose, signed by twenty-five percent of the members of the Full Body of Elders and presented to the chairman of the Guiding Elder Team, will require the Guiding Elder Team to call such a meeting.
 - c. Notice of such a meeting shall be given in accordance with the following:
 - 1) Notice: Notice shall be sent to each elder at least four (4) business days prior to the meeting.
 - 2) Method: Notice may be either written or electronic and may be delivered by post, email, text or other method pre-determined by the Full Body of Elders.
 - 3) Waiver of Notice: A waiver, whether before or after the time of the event for which the notice is given, shall be deemed equivalent to the notice. Attendance of a person at a meeting shall constitute a waiver of notice of such meeting, except when the person attends a meeting for the express

purpose of objecting at the beginning of the meeting to the transaction of any business because the meeting is not lawfully called or convened.

SECTION 6.I. VOTING.

1. **Votes of the Membership:**

- a. The Guiding Elder Team may bring an item before the congregation for a vote at any time pursuant to notice as provided in Article VI, Section 6.H.2.c.
- b. The notice for a matter requiring a vote must be announced in one or more of three ways:
 - a) at the morning service on two consecutive Sundays preceding the date of the vote;
 - b) by a written notice mailed to each member at least five business days prior to the vote;
 - c) by an electronic notice emailed to each member, with receipt confirmed, at least five business days prior to the vote.
- c. Members of each campus will vote on issues related to their specific location. Issues that involve the overall ministry of Village Bible Church will be voted on by members of all campuses. The Guiding Elder Team will determine which issues are specific to a local campus and which involve the overall ministry.
- d. Absentee voting is permissible and may be implemented at the discretion of the Guiding Elder Team. Absentee voting must be done in a way that a) confirms the eligibility of the voter, b) prevents the possibility of multiple votes by the same person, c) maintains the secrecy of the voter's ballot, subject to voting procedures, and d) keeps voting results confidential until the end of the voting period. In addition, absentee voting must conclude before the end of the in-person voting period. Electronic, automated and paper-based forms of absentee voting are all acceptable, assuming they meet the above requirements.
- e. The Guiding Elder Team will make decisions regarding all voting parameters including the method of voting. While voting may take place over an extended period of time and at different locations, the time period and location(s) must be disclosed in the communication regarding the vote. The period of voting should typically span no more than two Sundays. Votes and voter names must be kept confidential during the voting period.

- f. In order for a membership vote to be binding, a minimum of thirty-three percent of active voting members from campuses eligible to vote must cast a ballot.
- g. Abstentions will count towards a quorum but will not be counted as being either for or against a measure. Thus, the basis for calculating votes will be the number of votes actually cast for or against a measure.
- h. When fifty percent or more of voting members cast a ballot, the approval of any measure will require a two-thirds affirmation by the members who cast a vote.
- i. When fewer than fifty percent of the voting members cast a ballot, the approval of any measure will require a three-quarters affirmation by the members who cast a vote.

2. Votes of the Guiding Elders:

- a. Voting by the Guiding Elder team can take place in several ways:
 - 1) during a scheduled meeting, either in person or via a conference call;
 - 2) electronically via email, where confirmation of receipt is received from all Guiding Elders;
 - 3) absentee voting.
- b. Unless otherwise provided for in this Constitution, the approval of any measure that the Guiding Elder Team is voting on will require affirmation by two-thirds of the entire Guiding Elder Team (not just those present).

3. Votes of the Full Body of Elders:

- a. Voting by the Full Body of Elders can take place in several ways:
 - 1) during a scheduled meeting, either in person or via a conference call;
 - 2) electronically via email, where confirmation of receipt is received from all members of the Full Body of Elders;
 - 3) absentee voting.
- b. The approval of any measure that the Full Body of Elders is voting on will require affirmation by a simple majority of the entire Full Body of Elders (not just those present).

ARTICLE VII

OFFICERS

SECTION 7.A. OFFICERS

The officers of the Church shall consist of a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, and a Treasurer. Such other officers and assistant officers and agents as may be deemed necessary may be elected or appointed by the Guiding Elder Team. Any two (2) or more offices may not be held by the same person. The President, Vice President and Secretary will be chosen from the Guiding Elder Team.

SECTION 7. B. PRESIDENT

The President, also known as the Chairman of the Guiding Elder Team, shall be chosen from the Guiding Elder Team and shall be the principal officer of the Church, and subject to the control of the Guiding Elder Team per Article VI, Section 6.C.1.a.6. The President may sign, with the Secretary or any other officer of the Corporation authorized by the Guiding Elder Team, such documents and deeds of the Church as necessary or appropriate including, but not limited to, mortgages, bonds, contracts, or other instruments which have been authorized to be executed under the provisions of this Constitution, except in cases where the signing and execution thereof shall be expressly delegated by the Guiding Elder Team or by this Constitution to some other officer or agent of the Church, or shall be required by law to be otherwise signed or executed, and in general, shall discharge all duties incident to the office of President and such other duties as may be assigned to him by the Guiding Elder Team from time to time. Per Article VI, Section 6.C.1.a.6, this Guiding Elder role is not to be filled by the Lead Pastor, Executive Pastor or other staff elder.

SECTION 7.C. VICE PRESIDENT

During the absence or disability of the President, the Vice President, also known as the Vice-Chairman of the Guiding Elder Team, shall exercise all of the functions of President. He shall be chosen from the Guiding Elder Team and shall have such powers and discharge such duties as may be assigned to him from time to time by the Guiding Elder Team. Per Article VI, Section 6.C.1.a.6, this Guiding Elder role is not to be filled by the Lead Pastor, Executive Pastor or other staff elder.

SECTION 7. D. SECRETARY

The Secretary shall be chosen from the Guiding Elder Team and shall be: (a) be responsible for the keeping of the minutes of the Guiding Elder Team and committee meeting in one or more books provided for that purpose; (b) see that all notices are duly given in accordance with the provisions of these bylaws or as required by law; (c) be custodian of and maintain copies of all

corporate records, including all notices and voting records, whether in electronic or paper form; and (d) in general, discharge all duties incident to the office of Secretary and such other duties as from time to time may be assigned to him by the President or by the Guiding Elder Team. This role can be filled by any Guiding Elder, regardless of their status as staff or non-staff.

In the event that electronic communication such as email is used for notice of meetings and voting on informal actions, the Secretary shall maintain signed consents for every Elder and other individual entitled to notice under this Constitution. Said consents shall include: (1) express authorization to receive notice by email or other electronic communication; (2) the preferred electronic address for the Church to communicate with the individual; and (3) such additional information as may be requested by the Guiding Elder Team.

SECTION 7.E. TREASURER

The Treasurer shall: (a) monitor the financial books of the Church; (b) keep regular books of account and make them available for inspection at all times to the Guiding Elder Team; (c) render to the Guiding Elder Team from time to time as may be required, an account of the financial condition of the Church; and (d) in general, discharge all duties incident to the office of Treasurer, and such other duties as may be assigned to him or her by the President or by the Guiding Elder Team. Eldership shall not be a required qualification to serve as the treasurer of the Church.

SECTION 7.F. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

In case of the absence of any officer of the Church, or for any other reason that it may deem sufficient, the Guiding Elder Team may either delegate the powers or duties of such officer to any Elder or employee of the Church, for the time being, or may eliminate some or all of such powers or duties of such officer, provided a majority of the entire Guiding Elder Team concurs therein.

SECTION 7. G. ELECTION AND TERM OF OFFICE

All officers of the Church shall be elected by the Guiding Elder Team for a term of one (1) year at a regular meeting of the Guiding Elder Team. If the election of officers shall not be held at such meeting, such election shall be held as soon thereafter as conveniently may be. Each officer shall hold office until the first of the following to occur: until his or her successor shall have been duly elected and shall have qualified; or until his or her death or disability or until he or she shall resign in writing; or until he or she shall have been removed in the manner hereinafter provided. Election or appointment of an officer or agent shall not in itself create contract rights.

SECTION 7.H. REMOVAL

Any officer or agent may be removed by the Guiding Elder Team whenever, in its judgment, the best interest of the Corporation shall be served thereby, but such removal shall be without prejudice to the contract rights, if any, of the person so removed and will be in accordance with Section 6.G. of this Constitution.

ARTICLE VIII

FINANCES

SECTION 8.A. FISCAL YEAR.

The fiscal year will begin on July 1 and end on June 30.

SECTION 8.B. EXPENDITURES.

1. Loans or credit purchases in excess of five percent of the current total combined annual budget must receive membership approval through a vote held in accordance with Article VI, Section 6.I.1. of this Constitution.

2. When voting takes place concerning loans or credit purchases that are specific to a particular campus, only the members of that campus will take part. When voting takes place concerning loans or credit purchases and/or expenditures that impact the overall ministry of Village Bible Church, the members of all campuses will participate. The Guiding Elder Team will determine which issues are specific to a local campus and which impact the church as a whole.

SECTION 8.C. GIFTS.

1. The Guiding Elders reserve the right to accept or decline any gifts offered to the church.

2. **Designated Gifts:**
 - a. Gifts may be designated for a particular purpose only with the prior approval of the Guiding Elder Team.

 - b. No gifts will be designated through the church treasury to any agency or person not approved by the Guiding Elder Team.

ARTICLE IX PROPERTIES

SECTION 9.A. TITLE TO PROPERTY.

The title to all property of this church, both real and personal, will be vested in Village Bible Church as a corporate entity.

SECTION 9.B. ACQUISITION AND SALE OF PROPERTY.

1. The Guiding Elder Team, on behalf of the church, will have power to receive, acquire and hold property, both real and personal, in support of the general purposes of the church. All property so acquired will be held in the name of the church.
2. In addition to the provisions of Article IX, Section 9.B.1. above, any acquisition, sale, mortgage or transferring away of property valued in excess of five percent of the current all-church annual budget must receive approval by the Full Body of Elders pursuant to Article VI, Section 6.I.3.b. of this Constitution.

SECTION 9.C. ADOPTION AND ACQUISITION OF CHURCHES.

1. We believe that the church is of utmost importance to God. Because of this, we want to be available to help churches that are struggling.
2. There may be times when the best way to help a struggling church is to adopt (acquire) it into our church family and restart it. An adoption (acquisition) of another church will require the approval of the struggling church according to their by-laws and constitution as well as the approval of the Village Bible Church Full Body of Elders.
3. When we adopt another church, our intention is to revitalize the church and continue to use it as a ministry center for the long term. Our intention is not to acquire an asset to liquidate and utilize at an existing campus, unless this is expressly determined during the adoption discussions. This does not guarantee that a campus will never be closed and liquidated, but that will not be our original intention and such action will require the approval of the Full Body of Elders. It is within the purview of the Full Body of Elders to sell property and assets in line with Article IX. Section 9.B.

SECTION 9.D USE OF PROPERTY.

1. All properties belonging to the church will be available to the membership for purposes consistent with the ministry of the church, subject to regulation notices and procedures set by the Guiding Elder Team.

2. The Guiding Elders will have access at all times and under all circumstances to all properties owned by the church.

SECTION 9.E. DISSOLUTION. No part of the earnings of this corporation shall ever inure to the benefit of any donor, member, or director or officer of the corporation or any private individual, and no donor, member or director or officer of the corporation or any private individual shall be entitled to share in the distribution of any of the corporate assets. Should it ever become necessary to dissolve Village Bible Church, the remaining Full Body of Elders will select (an)other 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization(s) that is/are in agreement with the purpose and doctrine of this church to which to contribute the remaining assets of the church. (Examples of such organizations include mission organizations, parachurch agencies, Christian colleges and Bible-believing churches.)

ARTICLE X **ORDINATION**

SECTION 10.A. COMPOSITION AND FUNCTION OF A COUNCIL OF ORDINATION.

1. This church has the authority to ordain men within its membership to pastoral ministry.
2. When, in the judgment of the Guiding Elder Team, a member is qualified for and called to pastoral ministry, it is within the power of this Team to call and conduct a council of ordination. This council will consist of elders from our church and possibly also from other evangelical churches.
3. The council of ordination shall thoroughly examine the applicant regarding his personal Christian experience, call to pastoral ministry, educational training, doctrinal beliefs, reputation and demonstrated effectiveness in Christian service.
4. Upon completion of the examination of the applicant, a three-fourths majority vote by the council of ordination will be necessary for the Guiding Elder Team to ordain the individual.
5. The minutes of the council of ordination will be incorporated into the official minutes of the Guiding Elder Team.

SECTION 10.B. DISCIPLINE OF ORDAINED MINISTERS. The Guiding Elder Team has the power to discipline anyone ordained by this church, even to the point of revoking his ordination credentials, should he be found guilty of doctrinal or moral defection. Such discipline will be in accordance with the procedures and policies set forth in this Constitution and by the Guiding Elder Team.

ARTICLE XI

AMENDMENTS

This Constitution may be amended or revised by a vote of the membership of the whole church, held in accordance with this Constitution. In addition, such amendments or revisions must be presented by the Guiding Elder Team in written form to all the members of the church at least one month prior to the vote.