

***Riverside Community
Church
Constitution***



OUR CONSTITUTION ...

1. The name of the Church shall be the RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY CHURCH.
2. The church shall be a member of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa and the Baptist Northern Association but shall be independent of any control by them ...
3. The Church recognizes the Lord Jesus Christ as its supreme head and undertakes to manage its affairs according to New Testament teaching, believing that as the Body of Christ it is equipped by His Spirit to act, decide and direct. The Church will carry out its objects in a non-profit manner with an altruistic intent.

The objects of the Church shall be ...

- i. To glorify the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church.
- ii. To proclaim the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as revealed in the scriptures and to encourage and support the outworking of it.
- iii. To provide instruction and fellowship of believers, seeking to build them up to the measure and stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13).

Method of Functioning:

1. The Church shall exist as a legal entity in its own right, separate from its members.
2. The Church shall continue to exist even when its membership changes and there are different office-bearers.

OUR STATEMENT OF BELIEF ...

We believe:

- a. In the original Scriptures of the Old and New Testament in their original writings as fully inspired of God, and accept them as the final and supreme authority for faith and life.
- b. In One God, eternally existing in three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- c. That Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, was born of the virgin Mary, and is true God and true man.
- d. That God created man in His own image, that man sinned, and thereby incurred the penalty of death, both physical and spiritual, that all human beings inherit a sinful nature which issues (in the case of those who reach moral responsibility) in actual transgression, involving personal guilt.
- e. That the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, a substitutionary sacrifice, according to the Scriptures, and that all who believe in Him are justified on the grounds of His shed blood.
- f. In the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, His ascension into heaven, and His present life as our High Priest and Advocate.
- g. In the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- h. In the priesthood of all believers.
- i. That all who receive the Lord Jesus Christ by faith are born again of the Holy Spirit, and thereby become children of God.
- j. In the Resurrection of both the just and the unjust, the eternal blessedness of the redeemed, and the eternal banishment of those who have rejected the offer of salvation through Jesus' blood.
- k. That the one true Church is the whole company of those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit; that the local Church on earth should take this character from this conception of the Church spiritual, and therefore that the new birth and personal confession of Christ are essentials of Church membership.
- l. That the Lord Jesus Christ appointed two Ordinances – Baptism and the Lord's Supper – to be observed as acts of obedience and as perpetual witness to the cardinal facts of the Christian faith; that Baptism is the immersion of the believer in water as a confession of identification with Christ in burial and

resurrection; and that the Lord's Supper is the partaking of bread and wine as symbolical of the Saviour's broken body and shed blood, in remembrance of His sacrificial death, until he returns.

- m. That God has ordained marriage as a heterosexual relationship between a natural man and a natural woman.

Statement of Baptist Principles:

The Church further believes in the following distinctive Baptist emphases:

- a. The **DIRECT LORDSHIP OF CHRIST** over every believer and over the local church. By this we understand that Christ exercises His authority over the believer and the local church directly, without delegating it to another.
- b. The **CHURCH** as the whole company of those who have been redeemed by Jesus Christ and regenerated by the Holy Spirit. The local church, being a manifestation of the universal church, is a community of believers in a particular place where the Word of God is preached and the ordinances of Believer's Baptism and the Lord's Supper are observed. It is fully autonomous and remains so notwithstanding responsibilities it may accept by voluntary association.
- c. **BELIEVER'S BAPTISM** as an act of obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and a sign of personal repentance, faith and regeneration; it consists of the immersion in water into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- d. The **CONGREGATIONAL PRINCIPLE**, namely that each member has the privilege and responsibility to use his/her gifts and abilities to participate fully in the life of the church. We recognise that God gifts His church with Overseers (who are called Pastors or Elders) whose primary function is to lead in a spirit of servanthood, to equip and provide spiritual oversight, and Deacons whose primary function is to facilitate the smooth functioning of the Church. This principle further recognises that each member should participate in the appointment of the Church's leaders, and that a constituted church meeting, subject to the direct Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture, is the highest court of authority for the local church.
- e. The **PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS**, by which we understand that each Christian has direct access to God through Christ our High Priest, and shares with Him in His work of reconciliation. This involves intercession, worship, faithful service and bearing witness to Jesus Christ, even to the ends of the earth.
- f. The principle of **RELIGIOUS LIBERTY**, namely, that no individual should be coerced either by the State or by any secular, ecclesiastical or religious group in matters of faith. The right of private conscience is to be respected. For each believer this means the right to interpret the Scriptures responsibly and to act in the light of his conscience.
- g. The principle of **SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE** in that, in the providence of God, the two differ in their respective natures and functions. The Church is not to be identified with the State nor is it, in its faith or practice, to be directed or controlled by the State. The State is responsible for administering justice, ensuring an orderly community, and promoting the welfare of its citizens. The Church is responsible for preaching the Gospel and for demonstrating and making known God's will and care for all mankind.

Any change within the church structure or organisation which is in conflict directly or indirectly with one or more of the stated Baptist Principles will be invalid unless approved by at least 90% of the members present and entitled to vote at a duly constituted Special Church meeting of which at least three months' notice has been given.

1. MEMBERSHIP:

The membership shall consist of:-

- 1.1. Those who have given evidence of their personal salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, have publicly professed that faith, have accepted this Constitution and who have been admitted to membership.
- 1.2. Those who have been accepted by transfer, from another Baptist church having accepted this Constitution.
- 1.3. Those who freely and voluntarily apply for membership, do so on the understanding that adherence to the basic principles in the Church's Statement of Faith constitutes an inherent requirement for membership of Riverside Community. They consent to the fact that should any member violate such principles he/she may be required by the leadership of the Church either to accept their counsel and discipline or to forfeit his/her membership of the Riverside Community.

2. ADMISSION OF MEMBERS:

- 2.1. Every application shall be decided on at an Elders Meeting.
- 2.2. Application for church membership under Article 1.1. shall be made in the first instance to the Pastor. Selected Elders shall make careful enquiry regarding the applicant's spiritual experience, their successful completion of the Church Membership Course, and submit their recommendation to the Elders.
- 2.3. Application for church membership under Article 1.2. shall be made in the first instance to the Pastor. Selected Elders shall satisfy themselves concerning the applicant's spiritual experience with a view to applying for a letter of transfer for submission to an Elders Meeting once the applicant has successfully completed the Church Membership Course.

3. TRANSFER OF MEMBERS:

- 3.1. Any member in good standing who desires to join another Baptist Church shall be given a letter of transfer upon application from the church concerned.
- 3.2. Any member in good standing who desires to join a Protestant Church other than Baptist shall be given a letter of commendation upon application of the church concerned.
- 3.3. A General Meeting shall be advised of any transfers.

4. CHURCH DISCIPLINE:

- 4.1. If any member is absent from services of the church and/or neglects to comply with any of the privileges and obligations of membership for a prolonged period without good reason, the elders shall make enquiry.
- 4.2. The suspension or expulsion of any member shall be resorted to only if all efforts at restoration prove unsuccessful.
- 4.3. In purely personal matters, members shall be expected to act in accordance with the Lord's injunction in Matthew 18: 15-17.

5. THE ORDINANCES:

5.1. Baptism:

In addition to those desiring to join the Church in accordance with Article 1.2 the Elders, or at the request of

the baptismal candidate someone the elders deem trustworthy, shall be free to baptise by immersion any believer who desires thus to confess the Lord Jesus

5.2. The Lord's Supper:

The Lord's Supper shall be observed at such times as the Church shall decide. Attendance shall be open to all who love the Lord Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

6. GENERAL MEETINGS:

6.1. Annual General Meeting:

- 6.1.1. The Church business shall end on 31 December and the Annual General Meeting shall be held as soon thereafter as possible, but not later than the 28 February. Audited financial statements shall be submitted by the Treasurer. Reports shall be submitted by all ministry teams of the church. The annual election of Deacons nominated by the elders shall take place. The annual election of ministry team leaders nominated by the elders shall take place. The Agenda shall be available to all members prior to the meeting.

6.2. Special General Meeting:

- 6.2.1. Special General Meetings shall be convened as required by this constitution or on the initiative of the elders. Notice of a Special General Meeting shall be given prior to the meeting, clearly specifying the matters to be submitted for consideration.

6.3. Quorum:

- 6.3.1. Thirty percent of the total membership present when a meeting proceeds to business shall constitute a quorum.

6.4. Notice of Meetings:

- 6.4.1. Notice of all General Meetings shall be given at *all* services on two Sundays preceding the date of the meeting.

7. CHAIRMAN:

- 7.1. The elected Chairman of the Elders shall be the Chairman of all general meetings. (In the case where a Pastor is Chairman, he shall vacate the chair when matters pertaining to his own position are under consideration.)
- 7.2. Where the elected Chairman of the Elders is not present the meeting shall elect a Chairman for that particular meeting.
- 7.3. If a third of members present object to any matters brought up without notice, the Chairman shall rule that it be referred to a future General Meeting.

8. ELDERS:

- 8.1. The eldership shall consist of the elected Elders and existing pastors.
- 8.2. To qualify for consideration as an Elder a candidate shall have been in membership of this church for at least 12 months.

- 8.3. In the case of the first nominated elders, a candidate shall have been in regular attendance of this church for at least 6 months.
- 8.4. The appointment of an elder shall be at the recommendation of the elders (at any stage).
- 8.5. Any member may at any stage in writing nominate, with motivation, any eligible person for appointment as Elder with their agreement. Such nominations must be considered by the elders and if the elders are in agreement, said recommendation will proceed to 8.6.
- 8.6. Once a name(s) has been brought forward, the prospective elder shall enter a brief time of training.
 - 8.6.1. After a successful time of training, the name(s) of the prospective elder(s) shall be placed before the church for 2 weeks during which members have the facility to make enquiries as to the suitability of the prospective elder(s).
- 8.7. Should no enquiries give cause for serious reconsideration, the successful elder nomination will be inaugurated by the public laying on of hands at the next service.
 - 8.7.1. An elder shall hold office for one year but shall be eligible for recommendation by the elders for re-election for a further year indefinitely.
- 8.8. The Elders shall be responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Church and for its spiritual oversight, as well as deciding what Ministry Teams shall operate within the Church.
- 8.9. They shall also ratify the appointment of small group leaders/teachers, counselors and all ministry leadership positions that need to be made.
- 8.10. The Elders shall be accountable to the church for all tasks delegated to it, and for the proper administration of all church finances.
- 8.11. The Elders shall meet at least once monthly, if possible. Fifty percent of the elders shall constitute a quorum at meetings. The elders may invite any relevant persons including Deacons, Ministry Team leaders and the Treasurer, to attend its meetings from time to time.
- 8.12. Any appointment of non-pastoral salaried staff must be approved by the Elders.

9. DEACONS:

- 9.1. The church may from its membership elect deacons –
 - 9.1.1. over 21 years of age
 - 9.1.2. who are in membership
 - 9.1.3. nominated by the elders
 - 9.1.4. (including those nominated by a church member for the eldership to consider).
- 9.2. Deacons shall be responsible for the operations in the church, and also for other prescribed administrative and service duties.
- 9.3. Deacons shall generally meet at least once a month, where possible, one week prior to the elders.
 - 9.3.1. Deacons shall select a representative to report to the elders.
 - 9.3.2. The elected representative shall meet with an appointed elder who will present diaconate issues to the elders.

OR

- 9.4. Deacons shall meet at least once a month, where possible, one week prior to the elders
 - 9.4.1. An appointed elder will attend that meeting with the purpose of presenting diaconate issues to the elders.

10. THE PASTORATE:

- 10.1. The choice and appointment of the senior Pastor is vested in the membership of the church.
- 10.2. When an appointment of the senior pastor becomes necessary the procedure shall be as follows:
 - 10.2.1. A Call Committee shall be established consisting of 2 appointed elders, 2 appointed deacons and 2 elected members elected by the congregation.
 - 10.2.2. The Call Committee shall recommend only one name to any Special General Meeting.

- 10.2.3. The invitation shall be contingent upon the following –
 - 10.2.3.1. At least seventy-five percent of members present shall vote in favour by ballot.
 - 10.2.3.2. The prospective pastor shall have been baptised by immersion and shall accept in writing this constitution.
 - 10.2.3.3. The Pastor shall become a member of the church upon assuming the pastorate.
 - 10.2.3.4. Any engagement between the church and the Pastor shall be terminable by one month's notice on either side, unless otherwise mutually agreed upon.
- 10.3. The Pastor called to the general oversight of the church shall be known as the Senior Pastor, whose name shall be on one of the ministerial lists of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa.
- 10.4. When an appointment of a pastor other than the senior pastor becomes necessary the procedure shall be as follows. At the discretion of the Elders, either:
 - 10.4.1. The Elders shall recommend only one name to any Special General Meeting. OR
 - 10.4.2. The procedure defined in paragraphs 10.2.1 – 10.2.3 shall be followed .
 - 10.4.3. The invitation shall be contingent upon the following –
 - 10.4.3.1. At least seventy-five percent of members present shall vote in favour by ballot.
 - 10.4.3.2. The prospective pastor shall have been baptised by immersion and shall accept in writing this constitution.
 - 10.4.3.3. The Pastor shall become a member of the church upon assuming the pastorate.
 - 10.4.3.4. Any engagement between the church and the Pastor shall be terminable by one month's notice on either side, unless otherwise mutually agreed upon.

11. MINISTRY TEAMS:

- 11.1. Ministry teams shall be constituted for all ministries officially associated with Riverside Community, as defined by the Eldership.
- 11.2. A list of these ministries shall be published at least six weeks prior to the Annual General Meeting.
- 11.3. Nominations for each Team Leader can be submitted to the Elders.
- 11.4. After the two week nomination period, the Elders will publish their recommendation for Team Leader of each Ministry. Members have until the AGM to object to any nomination.
- 11.5. The nominated leaders of all Ministry Teams shall be church members.
- 11.6. The church shall approve all nominated Ministry Team Leaders.
- 11.7. Each Ministry Team shall appoint its own committee where necessary.
- 11.8. Each Ministry Team will draw up its own mission statement and operational framework in writing which must be approved by the Eldership. The Ministry Teams will execute their tasks within the framework approved by the Eldership.
- 11.9. Each Ministry Team must submit an annual report to the Eldership for inclusion in the church annual report to be presented to the church at the Church Annual General Meeting.

12. FINANCE:

- 12.1. The raising of funds for the Church by any means other than free will offerings, tithing or pledges shall be subject to the approval of the Eldership.
- 12.2. No donation will be accepted which is revocable at the instance of the donor for reasons other than a material failure to conform to the designated purposes and conditions of such donation.
- 12.3. The Finance Ministry will keep proper books of account, prepare annual financial statements and maintain suitable financial controls to protect church assets.
- 12.4. The Church's financial transactions must be conducted by means of a banking account in the name of the Church.

- 12.5. The Finance Ministry will report monthly to the Eldership on the financial affairs of the church and will submit the annual financial statements together with a written financial report to the Church Annual General Meeting.
- 12.6. The Church's income and property may not be distributed to its members or office-bearers, except as reasonable compensation for services rendered. No remuneration will be paid to any employee, office bearer, member or other person which is excessive, having regard to what is generally considered reasonable in the sector and in relation to the service rendered and has not and will not economically benefit any person in a manner which is not consistent with its objects.
- 12.7. The Church's accounting records and reports must be ready and handed to the Director of Non-profit Organisations, in as far as is possible, within six months of the financial year end. The Church will submit the required returns by the South African Revenue Service together with the relevant supporting documents.
- 12.8. To comply with the requirements of the South African Revenue Service for Tax Exemption, at least 85% of the Church's activities, measured either in cost or time spent, will be carried out for the benefit of persons in the Republic.
- 12.9. The funds of the Church will be used solely for the objects for which it was established, or shall be invested with a financial institution as defined in section 1 of the Financial Services Board Act, 1990 (Act No. 97 of 1990) or in any financial instrument of a company contemplated in paragraph (a) of the definition of a 'listed company'.

13. FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS:

- 13.1. The Church shall have power to
 - buy, sell, donate, let or hire, exchange, transfer, receive by way of donation or otherwise, movable and immovable property to invest its funds in Government stock, participating mortgage bonds, or investments with registered financial institutions
 - to borrow money with or without security in such manner as the Church shall think fit,
 - negotiate loans from bankers or others by overdraft or otherwise and by passing mortgage and notarial bonds for registration with the proper authorities
 - to open and operate upon banking accounts, and to make, draw, accept discount, execute and issue promissory notes, bills of exchange and other negotiable and transferable instruments
 - to guarantee the performance of contracts by any person or duly constituted church having objectives wholly or partly similar to the objectives of this church and to enter similar guarantee or suretyships of any description.

14. Indemnity

The Trustees and all Officers of the Church shall be fully indemnified against all actions, costs, charges, losses, damages and expenses which they or any of them shall or may incur in the execution of their duties, except such as they shall incur by their own wrongful action done intentionally or with gross negligence.

15. DISSOLUTION:

- 15.1. The dissolution of the Church may be effected by the 90% majority vote of members present at a Special General Meeting.
- 15.2. In the event of 15.1, such meeting shall thereupon authorise the Executive to take the necessary steps to wind up the affairs of the Church, and in particular to transfer the immovable property in due and proper form to the Baptist Union of Southern Africa or similar organisations - (see 15.4)

- 15.3. In the event of the Church at any time ceasing to exist, all acquired property or rights to property at such time shall ipso facto vest in and become the property of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa which shall hold, administer or deal with it in such manner as the said Union through its Executive Committee may deem best fitted to secure the objects in Clause 3.
- 15.4. The Church shall be deemed to have ceased to exist-
- 15.4.1. when dissolution shall have been resolved in accordance with 15.1;
 - 15.4.2. when public worship shall have been discontinued for a consecutive period of six calendar months;
 - 15.4.3. when the number of members whose names and full addresses are known, has dropped to below 10.

16. Modification of constitution

Any proposal to change this Constitution may be submitted by way of a 'notice of motion' to any general meeting. Proposed changes shall require the approval of eighty five percent of the members present at the meeting.

17. RESOLUTION OF DIFFERENCES / AREAS OF CONCERN

- 17.1. In the unhappy event of serious disputation or anxious concern
- As between a group or groups of members and the remaining membership, or
 - As between the Pastor and the whole membership or a group or groups within that membership, or
 - As between a Pastor and his Elders, or
 - As between the Elders and the membership, or
 - As between Pastor and Pastor which in the opinion of any one of the disputants abovementioned is impinging on the effective ministry of the Church or is seriously threatening its unity, it shall be the right and privilege of any such Pastor or of any four members of the elders or of any ten Church members to either:
- 17.1.1. Call for a special meeting of the elders with a view to resolving the differences. They shall invite three persons who are not members of the Church, nominated by the Executive of the Association with which the Church is in membership, to be present at such a meeting. One of these people shall be nominated to serve as Chairman of the meeting or meetings
 - 17.1.2. It shall be the obligation of the disputants and of the Church membership as a whole to afford the elders and the three Association representatives when so invoked, every reasonable opportunity to assist in bringing about a God-honouring solution. The Association representatives may, if they so elect, submit a written report with appropriate recommendations.
 - 17.1.3. In the unlikely event of these deliberations still not resulting in any satisfactory resolution of the differences or the areas of concern, then the Association representatives shall recommend to the Area Co-ordinator that an independent person be appointed to lead the Church through a conflict resolution process as in 17.1.4 etc below
- Or
- 17.1.4. Request the Area Co-ordinator of the Association with which the Church is in membership, to recommend from an independent mediator a person to lead the Church through a conflict resolution process.

- 17.1.5. During this process, which will involve a number of meetings and interviews, it shall be the obligation of all members of the Church to participate in whatever way may be required of them in order that a satisfactory God-honouring resolution of differences or areas of concern may be achieved.
- 17.1.6. The person appointed by the Area Co-ordinator shall be recompensed by the church for his/her services and travel.