

The Constitution of the Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church

Preamble

We the members of Phoenix Reformed Baptist Church, Phoenix, Arizona, do ordain and establish the following articles, to which we voluntarily submit ourselves:

Article I

Name

The name of this church shall be PHOENIX REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH of Phoenix, Arizona.

Article II

Purpose

The purpose of this church is to glorify the God of the Scriptures in promoting His worship, edifying saints, and evangelizing sinners. To this end we are committed to proclaiming the whole counsel of God especially His glorious Gospel of Grace in Jesus Christ throughout the world and to defending the "faith once delivered unto the saints." (Jude 3)

Article III

Articles of Faith

We do hereby adopt as a reasonable expression of our faith the 1689 London Confession of Faith as republished in 1974 under the title **A Faith to Confess**. This confession of faith gives a concise statement of biblical doctrine. In no way is it equal to the infallible authority of the Word of God. Nevertheless, it is an assistance to us in controversy, a confirmation in faith, and a means of edification in righteousness. In this Confession the members of our church will have a body of Divinity in small compass and by means of Scriptural proofs will be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them. (1 Peter 3:15)

Article IV

Members

SECTION 1. REQUIREMENTS FOR MEMBERSHIP

Any person who professes repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, who has been baptized upon profession of his faith, and who expresses substantial agreement with the doctrines, aims, and government of this church shall be eligible for membership. If the applicant has been a member of another evangelical church, a letter of inquiry into his or her standing with that church will be sent before final acceptance is made.

- **CONFESSION OF FAITH**—Any person who meets the above-mentioned requirements shall request membership to the Pastor or one of the other Elders. The Elders shall then fix a time and place for meeting with the applicant who shall attend and be questioned as to his or her basic Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and seriousness of intention to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this church.

- BY LETTER—Any person desiring to unite with this church upon letter of recommendation from another evangelical church shall present such letter to the Eldership and shall be examined concerning his or her Christian experience, doctrinal beliefs, and seriousness of intention to wholeheartedly support the total ministry of this church.

SECTION 2. FORMS OF MEMBERSHIP

A. REGULAR—All who are received into the membership of the church on the above mentioned conditions shall be considered members in good standing until such status is changed by one of the conditions set forth in Article IV, Section 4.

B. OTHER—The membership status of invalids, Christian workers, and others whose relationship to the church involves abnormal circumstances, shall be determined in each case by the action of the Eldership, subject to the approval of the congregation.

SECTION 3. PROCEDURE IN RECEIVING NEW MEMBERS

The names of persons applying for church membership will be announced to the congregation in the church bulletin one week in advance of their examination by the Elders to allow time for any objections against the membership of such persons to be shared privately with the Pastor or Elders. If, and when, the pastor and Elders are satisfied that an applicant has met the requirements for membership, they shall then present the applicant to the congregation at a regular Sunday Service, at which time the church members who possess voting privileges will then express their desire with regard to the reception of the candidate. Reception of members shall be recorded in the church minutes under "special Membership Meeting."

SECTION 4. TERMINATION OF MEMBERSHIP

A. BY DISMISSAL—Letters of dismissal shall be granted by the Eldership to members who apply for them provided they are in good standing and not subject to or under discipline at the time of application. When such letters have been granted, the relationship to this church shall be considered terminated. Letters of dismissal shall be given only to other evangelical churches.

B. BY EXCLUSION—If a member is habitually absent from the stated meetings of this church without just cause, or requests severance of membership, he may be excluded from the membership at the discretion of the eldership.

C. BY EXCOMMUNICATION—It is right and in harmony with the Scriptures for the congregation, upon recommendation of the Eldership, to exclude from this fellowship any person who persists in holding false or heretical doctrine; or who obviously and persistently lives inconsistently with his Christian profession; or who lives in violation of the law or public morals; or who walks disorderly; or any person who persists in disturbing the unity and peace of this church. (See Matt. 18:15ff; I Cor. 5:1ff; II Thess. 3:6, 11-15; Rom. 16:17)

SECTION 5. EXPECTATION OF MEMBERS

A. MEANS OF GRACE—All public and private means of grace, such as regular attendance at the services of the church, daily systematic reading of the Bible, and private and family prayers, shall be urged upon the members.

B. GOVERNMENT OF THE HOME—The church expects its members to follow the Scriptures in home government. God has required that godliness in the home have high priority in every life. The home holds a central attention in God's Law and is the object of frequent exhortations in the New Testament. Men are expected to rule their homes with gentleness but firmness. Women must be subject to their husbands in everything. Parents must train up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4), by holy example, catechizing, consistent education, and firm discipline (including corporal punishment). Children must reverently obey their parents (Eph. 6:1). These primary responsibilities, prayerfully executed, will honor the name of Christ in the community and strengthen the cause of Christ in generations to come.

C. MISSIONS AND WITNESSING—It is the duty of every Christian and of every Church of Christ to seek and extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Missionary efforts are the natural consequences of regeneration (Psalm 51:10-14). "Preach the Gospel" is a frequently repeated command of Christ. It is the duty of every child of God to witness by life and word. Personal efforts at witnessing for Christ are expected of every member. Beyond this we are committed to common efforts for sending the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

D. PRINCIPLES OF GIVING—We also assert our conviction that Christians are to support the work of the Lord by offerings made to the local church. Proportionate giving is a distinct and positive command in scripture (Malachi 3:8-11). Hence, we pledge ourselves to systematic contribution for the support of this church with a proportion of our income, according to the principle in I Corinthians 16:2.

E. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY—We shall require of each other in our daily walk and conversation loyal obedience to all those moral precepts established in the Word of God (Hebrews 10:24, 25). However, where God has not prohibited certain practices in His Word, the Christian has liberty to participate in them. The following principles must always guide the Christian's exercise of liberty:

- Fear of God—As the servant of Christ, all actions must be moved by a motive of love to God, and all objects must be used for His glory. The term "liberty" is often used as a cloak of malicious self-indulgence, which is sin. (I Cor. 10:31; I Tim. 4:4, 5; I Peter 2:15, 16)
- Love of Brethren—Though no man may dictate to the Christian's conscience, the welfare of fellow-saints must always deeply affect his decisions. In a spirit of serving the brethren, he must do that which he judges will edify them and prevent their stumbling (Gal. 5:13; I Cor. 10:23; I Cor. 8:9).
- Compassion for Sinners—Use of liberty must always be regulated by its effect upon sinners, and that behavior chosen which is likely to win some (I Cor. 9:19-22).
- Watchfulness over the Soul—Though free in conscience to use all of God's creation, carefulness in practice is demanded because of remaining lusts. Where the Christian judges himself weak through lust, he must abstain in order to perseverance. (I Cor. 9:23-27)

SECTION 6. MEMBERSHIP RECORD

In order to keep an accurate membership roll, there shall be an annual review of the membership roll by the Elders prior to the Annual Congregational Meeting. All who have been inactive for whatever cause will be classified as such and will be notified of this action.

Article V

Church Discipline

The discipline of the church shall be exercised according to the following principles:

SECTION 1. FORMATIVE DISCIPLINE

The sanctifying influence of formative discipline as taught in I Corinthians 12:12-27 should be well understood. Every member will then be satisfied with his place, and we shall all grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. By such observance can the church build up its members and use the talents of both old and young. All who have been redeemed should live for Him and the Church and not for themselves.

SECTION 2. CORRECTIVE DISCIPLINE

Corrective discipline implies disorderly conduct or heretical doctrine that is opposed to the church's life and faith. Reasonable efforts shall be made to clear up difficulties and remove offenses before any action is taken. No offense shall be brought before the church until the instructions of Christ have first been followed (Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15, 16). Corrective discipline has for its aim the glory of God, the welfare and purity of the church, and the spiritual growth of the offender.

SECTION 3. EXCOMMUNICATION FROM CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Procedure shall be in the following manner. The suspected person shall first be interviewed as directed in Matthew 18:15-18. If this does not lead to restoration of fellowship, written charges shall be filed with the Eldership. After a fair and impartial hearing of all the witnesses accessible and all the facts ascertainable, if the majority of the Eldership believes the accused to be guilty, the Eldership shall make an appropriate recommendation to the congregation for their action at a regularly called congregational meeting. The congregation shall have the right to excommunicate by a 2/3 vote of the members present and voting.

SECTION 4. RESTORATION TO CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

The right to exclude or excommunicate persons or the withdrawal of fellowship (II Thess. 3:6) is in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament (Matt. 18:16, 17). The Apostolic church also had a right to restore those persons who gave satisfactory evidence of being penitent (II Cor. 2:6-8). The object of the discipline having been accomplished, the congregation shall have the right to restore the penitent member to full membership by a 2/3 vote of the members present and voting.

Article VI

Ordinances

SECTION 1.

We believe that there are two ordinances that Christians are exhorted to observe, namely, Baptism and the Lord's Supper; that Baptism has no saving merit, but that after one believes and is saved, Baptism is the next step to show the world that he is now identified with Christ, who died, was buried and rose again; that whereas Baptism is observed once and is a sign of identification and a testimony to newness

of life, the Lord's Supper is commemorative and is to be observed often as a memorial to the broken Body and shed Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

SECTION 2.

Those eligible to commune at the Lord's Table are believers who have been baptized by immersion and who evidence a consistent life. While no un-baptized person can be a regular communicant, the Elders can admit to the Lord's Table an un-baptized visitor who is a consistent member of a properly constituted gospel church. No one may be invited to the Table without the knowledge of the Elders.

SECTION 3.

As a church we practice baptism of believers by immersion and, in accordance with the direction of Scripture, require submission to this ordinance as a prerequisite for church membership. Any person professing repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and whose life makes that profession credible, desiring to be baptized shall make application to the Pastor. The Eldership will then meet with the applicant who shall be examined concerning his or her Christian experience and understanding of the significance of the ordinance of baptism.

Article VII

Office Bearers

SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT

Jesus Christ alone is the Head of His Church. However, as Head, He has ordained that individual churches should be blessed with the spiritual rule and ministry of special office bearers. Therefore, it is the duty of the church to seek to discover those to whom Christ the Lord has imparted the necessary gifts for office bearing, and having formally recognized such by common suffrage, to set them apart by united prayer and to submit to their rule and ministry. Christ has ordained that the administration of local churches is to be by elders and deacons.

SECTION 2. ELDERSHIP

A. Pastors (1) Among the Elders are those whom we call Pastors. These are set apart for prayer and the study of the Word, and should, as far as is possible, be adequately maintained in material necessities, so as to be disentangled from the cares of a secular calling. (2) A Pastor, being by Scriptural terminology a teaching and ruling Elder, must evidence the personal, domestic, and ministerial qualifications for this office as set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9. (3) Anyone called to this office must be able to conscientiously affirm his agreement with the Articles of Faith and Constitution of this church. Should he at any time move from this position, he is under spiritual and moral obligation to make this known to the church. (4) The Pastor shall seek to discharge all the functions of his office as set forth in the Scriptures and in keeping with the exercise of his own distinctive gifts of ministry. In conjunction with the Elder(s), he shall have general oversight of all the church and its ministry and functions.

B. ELDERS (1) Elders are responsible for the spiritual ministrations of the church, the implementation of church discipline, and watching over the souls of the members as those who must give account to God for this responsibility. They, in conjunction with the Pastor, shall exercise the oversight of the church in all its ministries and functions. (2) Anyone desiring the office of an Elder must evidence the personal,

domestic, and ministerial qualifications as set forth in I Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:5-9. (3) Elders must seek to discharge their duties as set forth in the Scriptures, particularly such passages as Acts 20:17, 28ff, I Peter 5:1-4, and Hebrews 13:17. (4) While every Elder bears spiritual rule (and must be "apt to teach"), some will be more engaged in formal and public teaching, while others will be more exclusively engaged in the details of ruling. (See I Timothy 5:17) Elders are subject to each other, none having superior authority.

SECTION 3. DEACONS

A. Deacons are responsible for the business and secular affairs of the church, which are to be administered with spiritual grace and in cooperation with and subjection to the Eldership. They are to minister mercy toward those in physical need, especially within the church. They are to maintain the church premises.

B. Deacons must evidence the qualifications of the office as set forth in I Timothy 3:8-13.

SECTION 4. APPOINTMENT AND REMOVAL OF OFFICE BEARERS

A. The appointment of Elders (including Pastors) and Deacons for office within the local church is the responsibility of the local church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Lord's appointment is recognized both by the inward conviction of the individual involved, and by approval of the church observing the possession of those gifts and graces required by Scripture for the office concerned. The existing Elders shall recognize those who are already functioning in the use of their gifts and bring such before the church for recognition. Except for the Pastor, all officers shall have been a member of the church for a period of at least one year before being placed in nomination.

B. The recognition of office bearers is a matter of such importance that it should never be dealt with without much prayerful waiting upon God and an honest perusal of the relevant passages of Scripture and a frank evaluation of those who are being considered as potential office bearers. Each member of the congregation has a spiritual responsibility to be intelligently informed regarding the above-mentioned matters. It should be the desire of the congregation to come to one mind regarding those office bearers to whom they must submit in the Lord, but should such unanimity not be fully realized, no less than a 3/4 majority of the members present and voting shall be required for the election of an office bearer. After the names of potential office bearers have been set before the congregation, the potential office bearers will be asked to leave the presence of the congregation during which time the Scriptural qualifications for the given office will be read to the congregation and any items respecting those qualifications shall be freely discussed. Subsequent to a full and free discussion oriented to the relevant Scriptural passages in I Timothy 3 and in Titus 1, a written ballot shall be taken. The vote will then stand as it is first given in the written ballot.

C. Following the final recognition of an office bearer, there shall be a portion of a regular worship service set aside, at which time the office bearer(s) shall be formally set apart for his responsibilities by the prayer of the whole church and the laying on of the hands of any existing Eldership.

D. An office bearer may be removed from office should he neglect his duty, be guilty of sinful behavior, fall into error, or hold views contrary to our confession and constitution. If an accusation is made against an office bearer, the directions of I Timothy 5:19-21 are to be followed. The Elders are to approach the matter with great caution, firmness, and impartiality.

E. An Elder unable to fulfil his commitments should relinquish his office. Just as men grow in gifts and abilities with respect to the Eldership, so decline through old age may render a man incapable of fulfilling his office. Such retirement must be ratified by the church.

F. If at any time the Pastor shall make application to be released from his office, or if the congregation shall choose by majority to dismiss him, the relationship between Pastor and church may be terminated by the congregation in ninety days from the date of notice of intention, or in a shorter period of time, if it is mutually agreed upon. If the relations between the Pastor and congregation become detrimental to the welfare of the church, the Board of Elders shall have authority to consider this matter and make recommendation to the congregation at a duly called congregational meeting. If the Pastor's life or preaching shall violate the standards of this church, and the Board of Elders so recommends, the services of the Pastor may be terminated immediately following a congregational meeting, at which his dismissal has been requested by a majority vote of those members present and voting.

Article VIII

Official Board

SECTION 1. FUNCTION

The governing of the church and the conducting of its business, the management and control of its property, real and personal, and the general supervision of its work shall, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, be vested in the Official Board.

SECTION 2. MEMBERS

The official board shall consist of the Pastor(s), Elder(s), and Deacon(s). The Pastor shall act as chairman. The Board shall choose one of its number to act as Vice Chairman and another as Recording Secretary. Should there be more than one Pastor, the Board shall choose one Pastor as Chairman and another Pastor as Vice Chairman.

SECTION 3. MEETINGS

The Board shall meet at least once a month to discuss and act upon the general business of the church.

Article IX

Trustees

A. GENERAL STATEMENT—In order to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's," it is necessary that this church be incorporated under the Laws of the State of Arizona. In order to facilitate the discharge of corporate responsibilities, our Articles of Incorporation require that Trustees be elected by the church.

B. NUMBER AND ELECTION—The Board of Trustees shall consist of three members and one-third of the members of the Board of Trustees shall be elected by corporation at each Annual Congregational Meeting for a term of three years, and each member so elected shall hold office until his successor shall be elected and qualified. A Trustee may be elected to succeed himself. They may be elected from the existing office bearers or from the male members of the congregation. Trustees will not be considered a part of the Official Board merely by virtue of their election to this responsibility.

In case of a vacancy in the Board of Trustees, a successor shall be appointed by the Official Board and shall serve for the unexpired term of his predecessor.

This corporation may adopt By-Laws not inconsistent with the laws of the State of Arizona or these Articles and may also amend or repeal them in the manners set forth therein.

C. FUNCTION—The Trustees shall be called upon to perform whatever legal and business transactions peculiarly designated to them by the Laws of the State. In the discharge of their duties, they shall act only at the direction of the Official Board and of the congregation.

Article X

Congregational Meetings

SECTION 1. GENERAL STATEMENT

All Members should regard their presence at a duly called congregational meeting with the same seriousness with which they would regard their attendance at a stated service of worship. The Lord is present in power at the gathering together of the church and therefore all meetings should be carried out in a spirit of worship and unity. Every church meeting shall begin and end with prayer.

Congregational meetings of the church are confidential and therefore members should speak of these matters only to fellow-members.

SECTION 2. NOTICE OF MEETINGS

Notice of all congregational meetings shall be given at regular worship services on the two successive Sundays immediately prior to the meetings. In an emergency, a meeting may be called on shorter notice by notifying each member of the time, place, and purpose of the congregational meeting. A member will be considered "notified" when reached by telephone or when a letter has been mailed to address as shown on membership record allowing at least three days for delivery by postal system. Congregational meetings in which there is no business to be transacted by vote may be called at the discretion of the Pastor or Official Board without previous notice.

SECTION 3. NUMBER OF MEETINGS

Congregational meetings shall be held when needed for the reception of reports and the transaction of such other business as may properly be brought before the congregation. A congregational meeting shall be held as soon as possible after the close of each calendar year and shall be called the Annual Congregational Meeting. The regular election of officers and adoption of a budget shall take place at the Annual Congregational Meeting.

SECTION 4. METHOD OF CALLING MEETINGS

It shall be the right and responsibility of the Board of Elders to call all congregational meetings. The Board of Elders shall arrange the details of all congregational meetings and see that all possible preparation for their successful conduct is made. Nothing shall be brought before the church at church meetings except through the Eldership.

SECTION 5. QUORUM FOR TRANSACTION OF BUSINESS

The voting members present at any constitutionally called congregational meeting shall be considered a quorum for the transaction of business. It should be our goal to prayerfully discern the mind of God so that in all matters of church business it may be said of us, as was said of that church business meeting recorded in Acts 6, "that this thing pleased the whole multitude." However, in such situations where unanimity is not realized, no less than a 2/3 majority of those voting will make a resolution valid. In other matters where the Constitution or By-Laws require a different proportionate vote, this 2/3 figure will be overridden by the express statement of the Constitution and By-Laws regarding those items of business.

SECTION 6. VOTING ELIGIBILITY

Any member of the church eighteen years of age or over, in good and regular standing, shall have the right to vote on any question properly brought before the congregation. Members shall speak standing. Non-members who may be present at congregational meetings by special invitation have no speaking or voting privileges and must remain silent on all matters unless invited by the Elders and agreed to by the congregation to speak on certain matters.

Article XI

Amendments

Amendments to this Constitution may be adopted by a 2/3 vote of the congregation at any regular congregational meeting or special meeting called for this purpose, provided in either case that such amendment shall be distributed in written form to the membership at least two weeks prior to such meeting.