

*Approved March 23, 2016*

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

#### ARTICLE 1. MEMBERSHIP

- Section 1. Meaning and Purpose of Membership
- Section 2. Member Qualifications
- Section 3. Member Admission Procedure
- Section 4. Member Responsibilities
- Section 5. Membership Termination

#### ARTICLE 2. CHURCH GOVERNANCE

- Section 1. General Statement
- Section 2. Council of Elders
- Section 3. Committees and Appointees
- Section 4. Selection Process

#### ARTICLE 3. DEACONS

- Section 1. General Statement
- Section 2. Composition and Term of Service
- Section 3. Qualifications
- Section 4. Responsibilities
- Section 5. Organization
- Section 6. Selection Process

#### ARTICLE 4. SOUL CARE

- Section 1. General Philosophy
- Section 2. Biblical Counseling / Discipleship
- Section 3. Conflict Resolution
- Section 4. Church Discipline
- Section 5. Confidentiality

#### ARTICLE 5. MARRIAGE POLICY

#### ARTICLE 6. FACILITY USE

#### ARTICLE 7. FINANCES, EMPLOYMENT, AND PROPERTY

- Section 1. General Principles
- Section 2. Contributions
- Section 3. Financial Planning
- Section 4. Funds Accountability
- Section 5. Obligations
- Section 6. Authority to Bind the Church
- Section 7. Fiscal Year
- Section 8. Employment
- Section 9. Ownership, Dissolution and Distribution of Property

#### ARTICLE 8. REVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS

- Section 1. General Statement
- Section 2. Revision and Amendment Process



*Approved March 23, 2016*

## **ARTICLE 1. MEMBERSHIP**

### **Section 1. Meaning and Purpose of Membership**

The Scriptures portray the local church as a community of believers living willfully in harmony as a covenantal people under God, mutually committed to God's best in one another. To this end, membership refers to an individual's willing contribution of himself/herself as an active and engaged participant of the covenant family of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex. Joining in membership at Gospel Fellowship of Sussex means pledging oneself in good faith to the church community according to the spirit, principles, and intent of New Testament fellowship for the glory of God.

### **Section 2. Member Qualifications**

The membership of this church shall be composed of individuals who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They must give a clear verbal and written testimony and show evidence of saving faith in Jesus Christ, as well as be baptized as believers. They must also affirm the tenets of the Confession of Faith and offer evidence by their conduct that they are living in accord with their affirmation and this Constitution and Bylaws. Finally, they must be actively pursuing and continuing in a vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. 18 years old is recommended as a minimum age, but allowance for membership at an earlier age may be granted with approval by the Elder Council and the consent of the child's parents or guardians. Concerning matters of membership qualifications, the elders of this church shall have final authority, as in all matters of church governance set forth in Article 2, Section 1.

### **Section 3. Member Admission Procedure**

After meeting the qualifications as described in Article 1, Section 2, applicants shall be expected to complete a preparatory course of instruction, agree with this church's Confession of Faith, complete and sign both a questionnaire and membership covenant and be interviewed by either two (2) elders or by at least one (1) elder and an elder designee. Following the interview, the interviewers shall recommend to the Council of Elders those who qualify for membership. With the Council of Elders' approval, applicants will become members of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex.

### **Section 4. Member Responsibilities**

Members of this church are privileged to support this church in fulfilling its mission through the faithful stewardship of their skills, time, energy, and financial resources. All members of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex are expected to conduct their lives according to the standards set forth in Scripture. Such conduct includes moral purity, personal honesty, and promotion of church unity. Members are to be consistent examples of authentic Christianity as they seek to emulate the character of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Section 5. Membership Termination**

One's membership may be terminated for three reasons: relocation, inactivity, and disciplinary action. A member in good standing, moving from one location to another, shall at his/her request, be given a letter stating his/her standing at Gospel Fellowship of Sussex and indicating his/her resignation of membership. Any member no longer sharing in the fellowship and responsibilities of the church for a period of six months may, after a careful shepherding process and by act of the Elder Council, be recognized as having forfeited his/her membership.

Should a member, who is in process of church discipline as determined by the elders, request to terminate his/her membership, action upon that request will be delayed and withdrawal not acknowledged until the Elder Council, in good conscience, believes it has done all in its efforts to resolve the matter of concern with that member, acting in the hope and spirit of biblical restoration, scriptural love, and Christian reconciliation.



Approved March 23, 2016

## ARTICLE 2. CHURCH GOVERNANCE

### Section 1. General Statement

The church functions not as a pure democracy but as an institution under the headship of Jesus Christ and governed lovingly in a representative leadership by a council of qualified elders who are members of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex. The affairs of this church are ecclesiastical matters and shall be determined by procedures established by the Council of Elders and/or the church's bylaws.

#### A. Officers

The officers of the church shall be its elders. Elders shall be male and called to office by a selection process outlined below in Section 2.

#### B. Statutory Officers

The church shall not be required to adopt the secular offices of president, vice president, secretary, or treasurer, but any such officers may be appointed at the discretion of the Council of Elders. Only current elders may be appointed as officers, and all corporate powers shall be exercised by, and under, the authority of the Council of Elders.

### Section 2. Council of Elders

#### A. General Statement

The biblical titles, "elder," "overseer" and "pastor" are all synonymous terms that are used interchangeably in the New Testament to refer to the office of leadership within the church that is responsible for the teaching of God's Word, prayer and the shepherding care of Christ's church. These titles can be applied interchangeably to elders who are vocational (paid) or serve in a lay (unpaid) capacity. "Elder" emphasizes the seasoned maturity of Christian character that is produced by the transforming work of the gospel over a period of years. While "elder" does not indicate age or require an older man to fill this role, he cannot be a new convert. Only the transforming power of the Word of God coupled with time can produce the godly character needed to lead God's people toward spiritual maturity. "Overseer" emphasizes the caring oversight of the spiritual health of the church, providing leadership that ensures sound teaching of the Word, solid direction toward the biblical mission of the church and faithful administration of the affairs of the church. "Pastor" simply means "shepherd" and pictures the church leaders who are with the sheep, feeding them properly, tending to their needs, bringing them back when they go astray and guiding their paths to the Chief Shepherd of their souls, Jesus Christ. 1 Timothy 1:5 says, *"The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."*

#### B. Composition, Term of Service, and Calling

The Council of Elders shall be composed of men and there shall be both lay and vocational elders. There shall be at least one more lay elder than vocational elders. The number of elders to compose the Council may change from time to time as is deemed necessary by the Council. The term of service for an elder is understood to be indefinite, but it may be terminated by the unanimous agreement of the Council of Elders, excluding the elder in question, whether initiated by the elder himself or by the Council. Men that are seeking the role of elder should be motivated by a calling or an inward desire that springs from a loving heart.



Approved March 23, 2016

## C. Qualifications

Elders and nominees for elder shall be qualified for office as specified in the Bible. Relevant texts include 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; and 1 Peter 5:1-4.<sup>1</sup>

## D. Responsibilities

### (1) Spiritual Responsibilities

The fundamental spiritual responsibilities of the elders are to devote themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word for the advancement of Christ's Great Commission within and through the church to "go and make disciples of all peoples." This implies a high commitment to the task of making disciples and developing a church which grows toward excellence in this task. It also implies a readiness and ability to actively define, protect and defend the doctrine of the church. Serving the flock while governing the congregation is implicit.

### (2) Additional Responsibilities

The elders shall take particular responsibility to oversee worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, equip the church for the work of the ministry, encourage and teach sound doctrine, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, mobilize the church for world missions, examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, and oversee the work of the deacons and appointed individuals and committees. Furthermore, the elders are to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share this church's fundamental convictions as stated in the Confession of Faith.

## E. Organization

The Council of Elders shall organize itself however it determines to best achieve the mission of the church. The elders shall be equal in authority but may be specialized in function. The elders must meet at least once per month. A quorum for meetings of the elders is defined as at least one-half of the lay elders plus at least one-half of the vocational elders. The council shall select from among its lay elders a chairman who will lead the meeting and a secretary who will be responsible for record-keeping.

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<sup>1</sup> **1 Timothy 3:1-7** The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. (2) Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, (3) not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. (4) He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, (5) for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? (6) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. (7) Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

**Titus 1:5-9** This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— (6) if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. (7) For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, (8) but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. (9) He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

**1 Peter 5:1-4** So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: (2) shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; (3) not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. (4) And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.



Approved March 23, 2016

### Section 3. Committees and Appointees

The Council of Elders has the authority to create or dissolve committees and positions to which it may delegate any specific aspect of its responsibility. Every committee shall have a chairperson approved by the Council of Elders, to be responsible for the overall operation of the committee.

### Section 4. Selection Process

1. The Council of Elders, in awareness of leadership needs within the church, shall be regularly and prayerfully considering the qualifications of particular individuals to meet those needs.
2. When the Council of Elders determines a particular individual is qualified to meet pastoral needs of the church, the elders and any appointed delegates will conduct a personal interview with this person in order to determine that he is in agreement with their assessment of him and is willing to become an elder.
3. Should the individual agree with the Elder Council, a minimum six month internship will begin, upon which the congregation will be made aware and their feedback solicited and welcomed by the elders throughout this period. An exception to the six month internship is made in the case of one under consideration for a paid vocational eldership.
4. At the conclusion of the internship, the congregation will be encouraged to provide feedback to the elders within a period of no less than two weeks.
5. After considering congregational feedback, the elders will either affirm or withhold affirmation of the candidate in a communication time with the congregation.

## ARTICLE 3. DEACONS

### Section 1. General Statement

The title “deacon” implies an unusually graced servant positioned within the ministry, one who commands the respect of leadership by his/her character and labor. The Deacon Board refers to the entire body of deacons, both men and women who are members of the church, who assist the work of the church governed by the elders. Each deacon shall be appointed by the Council of Elders.

### Section 2. Composition, Term of Service, and Calling

The number of deacons shall be determined by the needs of the ministry, qualifications of individuals in the church, and their particular calling to that office. They serve indefinitely and may be terminated by resignation or unanimous decision by the Council of Elders.

### Section 3. Qualifications

A deacon’s character must conform to the biblical qualifications presented in I Timothy 3:8-13.<sup>2</sup> Other relevant texts include Romans 16:1-2; Acts 6:3; 1 Peter 4:10-11.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> **1 Timothy 3:8-13** Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. (9) They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. (10) And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. (11) Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. (12) Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. (13) For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.



Approved March 23, 2016

## Section 4. Responsibilities

Scripture suggests that the work of deacons is distinctive from that of elders in that deacons serve the physical aspects of the congregational body life. In contemporary times this may include care for the building, facilities, grounds, finances and physical needs within the body. Relevant texts include Mark 9:35, 10:45; Romans 15:8; 1 Corinthians 4:1, 9:19, 16:15; 2 Corinthians 4:5, 6:4; Galatians 1:10; Ephesians 6:6; Philippians 2:7; 1 Timothy 4:6; 2 Timothy 2:24; 1 Peter 2:16.<sup>4</sup>

Deacons shall assist the elders in any service that supports and promotes (1) the ministry of the Word, (2) new and existing ministries of the church, and (3) the individual care of the congregation. Deacons will be responsible for joyfully leading in areas of service to the body so that the elders will be freed to devote themselves to the study of the Word of God, prayer, and shepherding the body of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> **Romans 16:1-2** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, (2) that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. **Acts 6:3** Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

**1 Peter 4:10-11** As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: (11) whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

<sup>4</sup> **Mark 9:35** And he sat down and called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

**Mark 10:45** "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

**Romans 15:8** For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,

**1 Corinthians 4:1** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

**1 Corinthians 9:19** For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.

**1 Corinthians 16:15** Now I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and that they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints—

**2 Corinthians 4:5** For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

**2 Corinthians 6:4** but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities,

**Galatians 1:10** For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

**Ephesians 6:6** not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,

**Philippians 2:7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

**1 Timothy 4:6** If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

**2 Timothy 2:24** And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,

**1 Peter 2:16** Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.

<sup>5</sup> **Acts 6:1-4** Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. (2) And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. (3) Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. (4) But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."





Approved March 23, 2016

## Section 5. Organization

The elders may designate any specific deacon or group of deacons to specialize in some particular function. A designated chairman of the Deacon Board will be male, in accord with a complementarian view of gender roles<sup>6</sup>, as the church believes the Scriptures teach and as stated in the church's Statement of Faith. Meetings of the Deacon Board may be prescribed as necessary and beneficial, with the acknowledgement of the Council of Elders.

## Section 6. Selection Process

1. The Council of Elders, in awareness of leadership needs within the church, shall be regularly and prayerfully considering the qualifications of particular individuals to meet those needs.
2. When the Council of Elders determines a particular individual is qualified to meet ministry service needs of the church as a deacon, the elders and any appointed delegates will conduct a personal interview with this person in order to determine that he/she is in agreement with their assessment of him/her and is willing to become a deacon.
3. Should the individual agree with the Elder Council, a minimum six month internship will begin, upon which the congregation will be made aware and their feedback solicited and welcomed by the elders throughout this period.
4. At the conclusion of the internship, the congregation will be encouraged to provide feedback to the elders within a period of no less than two weeks.
5. After considering congregational feedback, the elders will either affirm or withhold affirmation of the candidate in a communication time with the congregation.

## ARTICLE 4. SOUL CARE

### Section 1. General Philosophy

The core of authentic biblical counseling is intentional biblical discipleship that lovingly applies the gospel of Jesus Christ to specific areas of sin, suffering and struggle. The goal is redemption, revival, reformation, renewal and restoration so that people made in the image of God will grow into the fullness of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The primary context for this kind of gospel transformation is the local church. The local church is a community of people transformed by the gospel and called to lead others to the transforming power of the gospel. Who better to minister God's grace to sinners than sinners who have received God's redeeming and transformative grace? Therefore, the leadership of the local church alone cannot *be* the counseling / discipleship ministry of

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<sup>6</sup> *Complementarianism* is often contrasted with the *Egalitarian* view of gender roles. Egalitarianism, generally speaking, would view male and female roles as equal and interchangeable. A Complementarian view of gender roles understands that men and women are created equally in the image of God and are therefore equal in worth, dignity, skill and intellect, yet they are designed by God to bear a unique role. In regards to gender roles in the home and the church, men are responsible to lead spiritually with the sacrificial love of Christ, and women are called to voluntary submission to that spiritual leadership as a reflection of Christ's own submission to the Father. As men lead sacrificially and women submit voluntarily, the church and the home portray the beautiful picture of Christ and His Bride, the Church, a winsome testimony for the gospel.

<sup>7</sup> **Ephesians 4:13** until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,



Approved March 23, 2016

the church, rather they should *lead* the counseling / discipleship ministry of the church by equipping the saints for the work of ministry.<sup>8</sup>

As the entire church body engages in counseling / discipleship in all its forms, shapes and sizes, God himself equips and uses each individual to minister to the needs of others. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 states that God is a *"God of all comfort, who comforts us in our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."* To limit counseling to the church leadership is to rob a significant resource of people who have been uniquely equipped by God through their own sin and suffering.

So then, the biblical vision of counseling / discipleship is for struggling individuals to enter fully into the transformed and transforming community of the gospel called the church so that the balm of the gospel can be applied gently and wisely to places of brokenness and sin, all the while praying that God's Spirit would graciously work repentance, restoration and maturity in Christ. Ephesians 4:15-16 sums up this vision, *"Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*

## Section 2. Biblical Counseling / Discipleship

While it is self-evident that biblical counseling pertains to the soul-care activities of all elders, the term "biblical counseling" and these related Bylaw principles may be applied to any in the church who counsel others for the purpose of offering spiritual help. Hence, these biblical counseling standards are held pertinent for all who may be officially recognized as lay biblical counselors at Gospel Fellowship of Sussex or simply more mature believers, teachers, and leaders who may not be officially recognized as lay biblical counselors, but who may be counseling or correcting others in personal, relational contexts.

Gospel Fellowship of Sussex believes that the Bible provides guidance and instruction for faith and life. Therefore, the church's counseling shall be based on scriptural principles rather than those of secular psychology or psychiatry. Neither the pastoral nor the lay counselors of this church are expected to be trained or licensed as psychotherapists or mental health professionals, nor should they be expected to follow the methods of such specialists.

Although some members of the church may work in professional fields outside the church, when serving as pastoral or lay counselors within the church they do not provide the same kind of professional advice and services that they do when they are hired in their professional capacities. Therefore, members who have significant legal, financial, medical, or other technical questions should seek advice from such independent professionals. Pastoral and lay counselors of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex may agree to cooperate with such advisors or authorities to help members consider their advice in light of relevant scriptural principles.

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<sup>8</sup> **Ephesians 4:11-16** And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, (12) to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, (13) until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (14) so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (15) Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.





Approved March 23, 2016

**Section 3. Conflict Resolution****A. Primacy of Scriptural Principles**

In the eventuality of disputes within our body, the church is committed to resolving all disputes in a biblical manner. This commitment is based on God's command that Christians should strive earnestly to live at peace with one another<sup>9</sup> and that when disputes arise, Christians should resolve them according to the principle set forth in the Holy Scripture.<sup>10</sup> The church believes that these commands and principles are obligatory for all Christians and absolutely essential for the well-being and work of the church. Therefore, all disputes in this church shall be resolved according to biblical principles.

**B. Scriptural Procedures**

When a member of this church has a conflict with, or is concerned about the behavior of another person, he/she shall attempt to resolve the matter as follows:

- (1) The offended or concerned person shall prayerfully examine himself/herself and take responsibility for his/her contribution to a problem.<sup>11</sup> He/she shall prayerfully seek to discern whether the offense is so serious that it cannot be overlooked.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> **Matthew 5:9** "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

**John 17:20-23** "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, (21) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (22) The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, (23) I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

**Romans 12:18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

**Ephesians 4:1-3** I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, (3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

<sup>10</sup> **Proverbs 19:11** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

**Matthew 5:23-25** So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, (24) leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. (25) Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

**Matthew 18:15-20** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. (16) But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. (17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (18) Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (19) Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. (20) For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

**1 Corinthians 6:1-8** When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? (2) Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? (3) Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life! (4) So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? (5) I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, (6) but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? (7) To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? (8) But you yourselves wrong and defraud--even your own brothers!

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

<sup>11</sup> **Matthew 7:1-5** "Judge not, that you be not judged. (2) For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. (3) Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (4) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? (5) You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.



Approved March 23, 2016

- (2) If the offense is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned party shall go repeatedly, if necessary, and talk to the offender in an effort to resolve the matter personally and privately, having first confessed any relevant wrongdoing on his/her part.<sup>13</sup>
- (3) If the offender will not listen and if the problem is too serious to overlook, the offended or concerned person shall return with one or two other people who will attempt to help the parties resolve their differences.<sup>14</sup> These other people may be members of this church, other respected Christians in the community, or trained mediators or arbitrators (conciliators) from a Christian conciliatory ministry. At the request of either party to the dispute, the church shall make every effort to assist the parties in resolving their differences and being reconciled.

## Section 4. Church Discipline

While conflict resolution attempts may lead to the process of church discipline, there are also times when biblically identifiable sin must be addressed at a more serious level. Verses such as 1 Corinthians 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 7:10; 1 Timothy 4:16; James 5:19-20; and Jude 1:22-23 persuade Christians that grace to save from sin may indeed - by the providential mercies of God in Christ - be conveyed through the confrontation of a sinning congregant via the administration of church discipline.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> **Proverbs 12:16** The vexation of a fool is known at once, but the prudent ignores an insult.

**Proverbs 15:18** A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention.

**Proverbs 17:14** The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.

**Proverbs 19:11** Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

**Proverbs 20:3** It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife, but every fool will be quarreling.

**Ephesians 4:2** with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

**Colossians 3:13** bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

**1 Peter 4:8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

<sup>13</sup> **Matthew 18:15** "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.

**Matthew 7:1-5** "Judge not, that you be not judged. (2) For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. (3) Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? (4) Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? (5) You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

<sup>14</sup> **Matthew 18:16** But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

<sup>15</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:3-5** For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. (4) When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, (5) you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

**2 Corinthians 7:10** For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.

**1 Timothy 4:16** Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

**James 5:19-20** My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, (20) let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

**Jude 1:22-23** And have mercy on those who doubt; (23) save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.



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The grace of church discipline is a blessing, a hedge, and a restorative sign of intentional and careful shepherding by the elders. It is a process designed both to protect the body and to offer a very present help to the church family. This shepherding process and protocol of church discipline is available and will be applied to anybody who has chosen, by their presence in attendance or by their stated intention through membership, to come under the shepherding care of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex.

The process of church discipline, which is to be handled prayerfully, carefully, and justly, begins by identifying those who are in need of correction.<sup>16</sup> This will be followed by four steps:

1. When a believer observes a pattern of biblically identifiable sin in a fellow believer, he/she should arrange a private meeting with that individual to “go and show him his fault” in a humble spirit. If the individual repents, forgive him/her.<sup>17</sup>
2. If the first meeting fails set up a second meeting, this time with others present. During these private and semi-private meetings, the individual should be repeatedly admonished, rebuked, and warned.<sup>18</sup>
3. As a final resort, the matter calling for repentance will be brought by the elders before the church body.<sup>19</sup>
4. Upon refusal to submit to church discipline, the unrepentant one is to be denied Christian fellowship, removed from relationship with the church, and treated as an unbeliever in need of the gospel,<sup>20</sup> with explanation and instruction given to the congregation by the elders. Furthermore, if the unrepentant

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<sup>16</sup> **Romans 16:17** I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.

**2 Thessalonians 3:14** If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

<sup>17</sup> **Matthew 18:15** - re. “private meeting” and “go and show him his fault” - If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.

**Luke 17:3** - Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,

<sup>18</sup> **Matthew 18:16** - re. “with others present” - But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

**Titus 3:10** - re. “admonished” - As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him,

**2 Timothy 4:2** - re. “rebuked” - preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

**1 Thessalonians 5:14** - re. “warned” - And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

<sup>19</sup> **Matthew 18:17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

**1 Timothy 5:20** As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

<sup>20</sup> **James 5:19, 20** My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, (20) let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

**Galatians 6:1** Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.



Approved March 23, 2016

one is a member, he/she will be publicly dismissed from church membership. The hope in all cases is for future brokenness, humility, repentance and reconciliation.<sup>21</sup>

## Section 5. Confidentiality

### A. Necessity for Confidentiality

The Bible teaches that Christians should carefully guard any personal and private information that others reveal to them. Protecting confidences is a sign of Christian love and respect. It also discourages gossip, invites confession, and encourages people to seek needed counseling. Since these goals are essential to the ministry of the gospel and the work of this church, all members are expected to refrain from gossip and to respect the confidence of others. In particular, those that counsel shall carefully protect all information that they receive through biblical counseling, subject to the following guidelines.<sup>22</sup>

### B. Limitations of Confidentiality

Although confidentiality is to be respected as much as possible, there are times when it is appropriate to reveal certain information to others. In particular, when those of this church who counsel believe it is biblically necessary, they may disclose confidential information to appropriate people in the following circumstances:

- (1) When a counselor is uncertain in counseling a person about a particular problem, he/she may seek advice from the counselors/elders of this church, or, if the person attends another church, from the pastors or elders of that church.

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<sup>21</sup> **1 Corinthians 5:4,5** When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

**2 Corinthians 2:5-11** Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.

**1 Timothy 1:19b, 20** By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

<sup>22</sup> **Matthew 7:12** - in this paragraph, re. "Christian love and respect" - So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

**Proverbs 16:28** - in this paragraph, re. "gossip" - A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.

**Proverbs 26:20** - in this paragraph, re. "gossip" - For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases.

**Proverbs 11:13** - in this paragraph, re. "gossip" - Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.

**Proverbs 28:13** - in this paragraph, re. "invites confession" - Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

**James 5:16** - in this paragraph, re. "invites confession" - Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

**Romans 15:14** - in this paragraph, re. "seeks needed counseling" - I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.



Approved March 23, 2016

- (2) When a person discloses information that he/she or any other person is in imminent danger of serious harm unless others intervene, the counselor must report such information to the proper authorities.
- (3) When required by law to report suspected abuse, information may be disclosed.

## ARTICLE 5. MARRIAGE

Because God has ordained marriage and defined it as the covenant relationship between a man, a woman, and Himself, Gospel Fellowship of Sussex will only recognize marriages between a biological man and a biological woman.<sup>23</sup> Further, the elders of this church shall only participate in weddings and officiate marriages between one man and one woman. Finally, the facilities and property of this church shall only host weddings (or related events) between one man and one woman. A wedding is necessarily considered to be a worship service, and therefore the use of facilities and property of this church for wedding or related events shall be carried out in accordance with the church's understanding of Scripture, including the provision that marriage is defined by God as between one man and one woman.

## ARTICLE 6. FACILITY USE

The church desires that its facilities be used for the fellowship of the Body of Christ and to bring glory to God alone. Although the facilities are not generally open to the public, the church may make them available to approved non-members as a witness to the church's faith, in a spirit of Christian charity, and as a means of demonstrating the gospel of Jesus Christ in practice.

Facility use will not be permitted to persons or groups holding, advancing, or advocating beliefs or practices that conflict with the church's faith or moral teachings, which are summarized in, among other places, the church's Constitution, Bylaws and Confession of Faith. Nor may church facilities be used for activities that contradict or are deemed inconsistent with the church's faith or moral teachings. The elders, or their official designee, are the final decision-makers concerning use of church facilities. Restricted facility use is necessary because the church, in good conscience, may not materially cooperate in activities or beliefs that are contrary to its faith.<sup>24</sup>

This policy applies to all church facilities, regardless of whether the facilities are connected to the church's sanctuary, because the church sees all of its property as holy and set apart to worship God.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "Biological" here - and either gender stated elsewhere in these bylaws - is intended to mean naturally created or formed via conception and acknowledged at moment of birth. This is clarified in view of transgender surgery possibilities now made possible by modern technologies.

<sup>24</sup> **2 Corinthians 6:14** Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?  
**1 Thessalonians 5:22** Abstain from every form of evil.

<sup>25</sup> **Colossians 3:17** And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

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## ARTICLE 7. FINANCES, EMPLOYMENT, AND PROPERTY

### Section 1. General Principles

The ministries of this church shall be supported primarily by the freewill offerings of those who are led by the Holy Spirit to contribute to its support. All fundraising shall be considered and approved by the Council of Elders.

### Section 2. Contributions

#### A. General Contributions

Membership in this church involves financial responsibility to support the church and its causes with regular giving. Each member shall be encouraged in scriptural giving, submitting to the spirit and intent of generous, willing, and cheerful giving according to 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.<sup>26</sup>

#### B. Special Contributions

Individuals desiring to make special contributions or designated gifts may do so provided the project has been approved by the elders.

### Section 3. Financial Planning

#### A. Annual Budget

The financial planning of the church shall be carried out by means of an annual budget. The budget shall be crafted and proposed by assigned delegates by the elders (i.e. a Finance Committee, deacons, etc), submitted to the elders for approval, and presented to the congregation.

#### B. Compensation

Matters involving staff compensation shall be the responsibility of the lay members of the Council of Elders with assistance by assigned financial delegates of the church.

### Section 4. Funds Accountability

Accountability of financial contributions from all sources shall be the responsibility of the Council of Elders. An individual or committee shall be appointed to disburse funds according to the financial program of the church as detailed in the annual budget or other authorized designations. The Council of Elders is responsible to have a financial review of the church conducted at least once every other year. Those conducting the audit shall not be members of the Council of Elders.

<sup>26</sup>

**2 Corinthians 9:6-15** The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. (7) Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (8) And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. (9) As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (10) He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. (11) You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. (12) For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. (13) By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, (14) while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. (15) Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!





*Approved March 23, 2016*

### **Section 5. Obligations**

No loan or contract exceeding 5% of the total annual budget whereby the credit of the church is pledged, or no single budgeted or non-budgeted item exceeding 5% of the budget shall be made or purchased except by recommendation of the appointed financial delegates of the church and approval by the Council of Elders.

### **Section 6. Authority to Bind the Church**

Assigned designees by the Council of Elders are the only individuals who have authority, in accordance with these Bylaws, the church Constitution, and any applicable laws, to execute legal documents relating to real estate, church property, and church finances.

### **Section 7. Fiscal Year**

The fiscal year of this church shall be fixed by resolution of the Council of Elders.

### **Section 8. Employment**

#### **A. Church Membership**

All employees of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex will first be members. As members, they have agreed to the Constitution and Confession of Faith. The appropriate membership documents will be kept on file and any violation of them will constitute grounds for termination.

#### **B. Job Description**

Each paid position will have a written job description which outlines the duties, skills and requirements as well as the contribution of this position to the mission of Gospel Fellowship of Sussex. The church's paid personnel are viewed as ministers of the gospel.

### **Section 9. Ownership and Distribution of Property**

The church shall hold, own, and enjoy its own personal and real property, without any right of reversion to another entity, except as provided by the Bylaws. In the eventuality of the dissolution of the church, its property shall be applied and distributed as follows:

1. All liabilities and obligations of the church shall be paid and discharged, or adequate provision shall be made thereof.
2. Assets held by the church upon condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance, which condition occurs by reason of the dissolution, shall be returned, transferred, or conveyed in accordance with such requirements.
3. Assets received and not held upon a condition requiring return, transfer, or conveyance by reason of the dissolution, shall be transferred or conveyed to one or more domestic or foreign corporations, societies, or organizations that are approved by law and are engaged in activities substantially similar to those of the church; this distribution shall be done pursuant to a plan adopted by the Council of Elders, provided that no assets are distributed to any organization governed by a member of the Council of Elders.
4. Any assets not otherwise disposed of shall be disposed of by a court of competent jurisdiction of the county in which the principal office of the church is then located, for such purposes and to such organizations as said court shall determine.



*Approved March 23, 2016*

## **ARTICLE 8. REVISIONS AND AMENDMENTS**

### **Section 1. General Statement**

These bylaws may be revised or amended by the unanimous decision of the Council of Elders. The same holds true for the other foundational documents of the church: the Constitution, the Confession of Faith and the Statement of Faith.

### **Section 2. Revision and Amendment Process**

1. The Council of Elders, in awareness of needs concerning revision or amendment possibilities, shall be regularly and prayerfully considering them.
2. When the Council of Elders more specifically pinpoints locations within the document(s) that warrant reconstruction, the elders and any appointed delegates will convene a committee dedicated to group study and mutual dialog for helping formulate statements that can be unanimously agreed upon by the Council. The congregation will be informed that this process has begun. They will also be given an explanation as to why it is underway.
3. After continued prayer and sufficient deliberations, the elders shall present to the congregation their proposed recommendations. Once the changes are recommended, the congregation will be encouraged to provide feedback to the elders within a period of no less than two weeks.
4. After considering congregational feedback, the elders will affirm their recommendations, withhold that affirmation, or perhaps refine their original recommendation in light of congregational wisdom and share this information in a meeting with the congregation.