

The Constitution of The Garden Community of Baltimore

To Do Business As: "The Garden Church" or "The Garden"

Since it pleased God, by His Holy Spirit, to call certain of His servants to unite in Baltimore in 2008 under the name The Garden Community of Baltimore (*The Garden Church, The Garden*) for the worship of God and the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and since He has sustained and prospered this work to the present day; and

Whereas we, having searched the Scriptures under the guidance of His Spirit, have recognized the need to constitute ourselves to conform more closely to His will for the Church in this age and to prepare ourselves for greater efforts in His name;

Now therefore, we do hereby organize ourselves in accord with the non-profit laws of the state of Maryland and adopt this Constitution as our articles of governance, to be interpreted at all times to reflect the character of and bring glory to Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Holy Bible and articulated in the Statement of Basic Beliefs and Covenant of this church.

Article 1: Membership

Section 1.

Clause 1. Members of this church (*i.e.* the congregation) shall be believers in Jesus Christ Who give evidence of regeneration;

Clause 2. Who have been baptized as believers in obedience to Christ;

Clause 3. Who hold without mental reservation the doctrines of our church as expressed in the Statement of Basic Belief; and

Clause 4. Who promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant.

Section 2.

Clause 1. An Applicant shall be received as a Member of the church upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of at least three-quarters of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Clause 2. No Member of this church shall retain membership in any other church.

Section 3.

Clause 1. Members shall be expected to participate actively in the life of the church By regularly attending its Sunday meetings;

Clause 2. By faithfully observing its ordinances, namely Baptism and Communion;

Clause 3. By submitting to its discipline and instruction;

Clause 4. By attending its Members' Meetings; and

Clause 5. By voting on the election of officers, on decisions regarding membership, and on all other matters submitted to the congregation's vote.

Clause 6. No Person who is not a Member or Church Associate (as defined in Article 1, Section 5) shall serve in the public ministries or offices of the church, without the consent of the Elders.

Section 4.

Clause 1. The church shall recognize the termination of a Person's Membership following his or her death, and may do so following his or her voluntary resignation or joining with another church.

Clause 2. The church shall have authority to exercise discipline over its Members, which may involve excluding from its Membership any Member consistently neglectful of the duties enumerated in Article 1, Sections 1 and 3, or guilty of scandalous conduct by which the reputation of Christ or His church is dishonored. Any such action shall be taken in accordance with the instructions of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 and those of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 2:6-8.

Clause 3. The church shall have authority to refuse a Member's voluntary resignation or transfer of membership to another church, either for the purpose of proceeding with a process of church discipline, or for any other reason the church deems necessary or prudent.

Clause 4. A Member shall be removed from Membership as a matter of church discipline upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of at least three-quarters of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Section 5.

Clause 1. Individuals who are temporarily residing in the Baltimore area may be received as Associates of the church, provided they are members in good standing of another evangelical Christian church.

Clause 2. An Applicant shall be received as an Associate upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of at least three-quarters of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Clause 3. Associates shall retain membership in one other evangelical and baptistic church.

Clause 4. Associates shall be expected to participate actively in the life of the church in the same way as Members, except that they shall not be eligible either to stand for any office or to vote.

Clause 5. A Person's Association with the church shall terminate immediately upon the ending of residence in the Baltimore area or by voluntary resignation. The church shall have authority to terminate the Association of any Church Associate consistently neglectful of his or her duties, or guilty of scandalous conduct by which the reputation of Christ or His church is dishonored. In such an event, the Elders shall refer disciplinary action to the pastor or elders of the excluded person's home church.

Article 2: Meetings

Section 1.

The church shall meet together for public worship each Sunday, and at other times throughout the week as the church may determine.

Section 2.

Clause 1. The church shall hold a regular Members' Meeting at least every other month, which shall not be held in place of the regular Sunday meeting.

Clause 2. The Elders, whenever they deem it necessary, or within thirty days of receiving a written request signed by ten percent of the voting Membership, shall call a special Members' Meeting.

Clause 3. No Members' Meeting shall be held until the date, time, and place of such meeting shall be announced at every public meeting of the church for one week immediately prior to the Members' Meeting in question.

Clause 4. The elders shall designate an elder to preside as Moderator at all Members' Meetings, but the Moderator shall have no vote, unless the Members be equally divided on a question.

Clause 5. Members' Meetings shall proceed according to a reasonable order, and the Members present shall constitute a quorum to do business. Motions shall be adopted upon the agreement of a majority of the Members present and voting on the question, except on matters otherwise provided for in this constitution.

Section 3.

Clause 1. The church, duly assembled in a Members' Meeting, shall be responsible To vote on officers;

Clause 2. To receive Applicants into church Membership;

Clause 3. To recognize termination of Membership due to death, transfer of Membership, or voluntary resignation;

Clause 4. To exercise church discipline;

Clause 5. To approve, once in every year, a church budget;

Clause 6. To hear reports from the Elders and, from time to time, the various Deacons and other ministry leaders;

Clause 7. To take any other action they deem necessary or desirable.

Article 3: Government

Section 1.

The biblical offices in the church shall be Elders and Deacons and final earthly authority is vested in the assembled congregation.

Section 2.

Clause 1. Oversight of the ministry and resources of the church shall be vested in a Council of Elders, which shall be comprised of not fewer than three men who satisfy the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Clause 2. Elders shall be selected as follows: The Council of Elders shall at any regular Members' Meeting present to the church a list of nominees to the office of Elder. For a period of at least one month, the church shall consider whether such nominees are qualified for the office. If any Member believes one or more of the nominees to be unqualified, that Member shall express such concern to the Elders, who may on the basis of that advice remove names from the list of nominees. No name shall be added to the list of nominees which was not included on the initial list. When a period of one month has elapsed, the Elders shall at the next regular Members' Meeting present a final list of nominees to the church, who shall vote Yes or No on each of the nominees in turn. The Moderator shall count the votes, and any nominee having the approval of at least three-quarters of the Members present and voting on his nomination shall be an Elder, which men the church shall in due haste publicly recognize and set apart as such.

Clause 3. The Elders shall at any regular Members' Meeting solicit from the congregation recommendations for the office of Elder, which recommendations shall be given to the Elders in private, and not publicly. The Elders shall give due consideration to any recommendation received.

Clause 4. In accordance with the roles of manhood and womanhood as set forth in Scripture, especially 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, the role of elder shall be exclusively filled by men.

Clause 5. A majority of the Elders shall be laymen, that is, church members not in the regular full-time pay of the church.

Clause 6. With the exception of Pastors in full-time pay of the church (Senior and Associate Pastors), Elders shall be reaffirmed by vote of the church triennially, and having served two consecutive three-year terms, shall not be eligible for re-election for one year. A preaching Elder shall not be subject to a reaffirmation vote, nor to any term limit.

Clause 7. No Elder shall hold the office of Deacon during his tenure.

Clause 8. The Council of Elders shall choose their Chairman and other Officers. In compliance with the nonprofit corporation laws of Maryland, the Council of Elders shall serve as the Board of Directors of the Corporation, and the Chairman of the Elders shall serve as the president of the corporation.

Clause 9. The Elders shall, in keeping with the principles set forth in the Scriptures, especially Acts 6:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; James 5:14; and 1 Peter 5:1-4, undertake the responsibility of shepherding God's flock by devoting themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They shall have particular authority To plan and oversee worship services;

Clause 10. To oversee the ordinances, namely Baptism and the Lord's Supper;

Clause 11. To examine and instruct prospective members;

Clause 12. To oversee the process of church discipline;

Clause 13. To examine and recommend candidates for all offices and positions;

Clause 14. To oversee the work of the Deacons and all other agents of the church; and

Clause 15. To take any other action which shall be necessary and proper for faithfully overseeing and shepherding the church.

Clause 16. An Elder shall be removed from office upon the vote of two-thirds of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 and those of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17-21.

Section 3.

Clause 1. Primary responsibility for preaching and teaching the Scriptures in public meetings of the church may be vested in a preaching Elder, or Senior Pastor.

Clause 2. A preaching Elder shall be selected as follows: The Elders shall at any regular Members' Meeting present to the church the name of one nominee to the position of preaching Elder. For a period of at least two weeks, the church shall consider the nominee's gifts in preaching and teaching, and his commitment to minister personally to the members of this church. If any Member believes the nominee to be unqualified, that Member shall express such concern to the Elders. When a period of two weeks has elapsed, the Elders shall at the next Members' Meeting present the nominee for preaching Elder to the church, who shall vote Yes or No on his selection as such. The Moderator shall count the votes, and if the nominee receives the approval of at least three-quarters of the Members present and voting on the question, he shall be a Member of the church, an Elder, and a preaching Elder, whom the church shall in due haste publicly recognize as such.

Clause 3. A preaching Elder shall meet all the qualifications and hold all the rights and responsibilities of a Member of the church. He shall satisfy all the qualifications and hold all the duties and responsibilities of an Elder. In terms of formal authority, there shall be no distinction between an Elder and a preaching Elder.

Clause 4. A preaching Elder shall not be subject to a reaffirmation vote, nor to any term limit.

Clause 5. A preaching Elder shall be removed from office upon the vote of two-thirds of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting. Any such action shall be done in accordance with the instructions of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 and those of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17-21.

Section 4.

Clause 1. Particular service to the church shall be provided by Deacons, the number of which shall vary as the church has need, and who shall satisfy the qualifications set forth in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

Clause 2. The Deacons shall not meet together regularly as a body. Each diaconate position shall serve a particular need of the church, and shall be created or dissolved upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of a majority of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Clause 3. Deacons shall be selected as follows: The Council of Elders shall at any regular Members' Meeting present to the church a list of nominees to the office of deacon. For a period of at least one month, the church shall consider whether such nominees are qualified for the office. If any Member believes one or more of the nominees to be unqualified, that Member shall express such concern to the Elders, who may on the basis of that advice remove names from the list of nominees. No name shall be added to the list of nominees which was not included on the initial list. When a period of one month has elapsed, the Elders shall at the next regular Members' Meeting present a final list of nominees to the church, who shall vote Yes or No on each of the nominees in turn. The Moderator shall count the votes, and any nominee having the approval of two-thirds of the Members present and voting on his nomination shall be a Deacon, which men or women the church shall in due haste publicly recognize and set apart as such.

Clause 4. At least once in every year, the Elders shall at any regular Members' Meeting solicit from the congregation recommendations for new diaconate positions and for qualified persons to fill new or vacant positions, which recommendations shall be given to the Elders in private, and not publicly. The Elders shall give due consideration to any recommendation received.

Clause 5. Deacons shall be reaffirmed by vote of the church triennially.

Clause 6. In keeping with the principles set forth in Acts 6:1-6, Deacons shall not exercise a ministry of spiritual authority, but shall support the Elders' ministry of the Word, work to maintain the unity of the church, and care for the physical needs of the church.

Clause 7. The church shall select a Deacon of Finance, who shall, with the advice and approval of the Elders, present to the church at the penultimate regular Members' Meeting of every year an itemized budget, which shall be considered and voted upon by the church at the final regular Members' Meeting of every year.

Clause 8. The church may recognize Deacons to take responsibility For seeing that the sick, the sorrowing, the aged, and the infirm receive spiritual and physical comfort;

Clause 9. For leading the hospitality ministries of the church;

Clause 10. For attending to the normal care and maintenance of church properties;

Clause 11. For receiving, holding, and disbursing a fund for benevolence, and for reporting from time to time on the use of such funds to both the Elders and the church;

Clause 12. For attending to the accommodations for public worship;

Clause 13. For assisting in distributing the elements during the Lord's Supper; and

Clause 14. For serving in other specific capacities as the church has need.

Clause 15. No person or group shall solicit money on behalf of the church or any of its ministries without the approval of the Elders and the Deacon of Finance.

Clause 16. A Deacon may be removed from office by a decision of the Elders, or upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of a majority of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Clause 17. In the event a diaconate position becomes vacant, the Elders may appoint a person to fill that position and assume its responsibilities, until such time as some person can be duly recognized by the church as a Deacon.

Article 4: Administration

Section 1.

Clause 1. The Clerk shall record the minutes of all regular and special Members' Meetings of the church, keep an accurate roll of the membership, and give reports as requested by the Elders, particular Deacons, or the church. In compliance with the nonprofit corporation laws of the state of Maryland, the Clerk shall serve as the secretary of the corporation.

Clause 2. The Clerk shall be selected to a renewable term of one year upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of a majority of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Clause 3. The Clerk may be removed from office by a decision of the Elders, or by a majority vote of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Section 2.

Clause 1. The Treasurer shall ensure that all funds and securities of the church are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories as designated by the church. The Treasurer shall also ensure that full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements are kept in books belonging to the church, and that adequate controls are implemented to guarantee that all funds belonging to the church are appropriately handled by any officer, employee, or agent of the church. The Treasurer shall render to the Elders at least once in every year, or whenever they may request it, an account of all financial transactions and of the financial condition of the church. The Treasurer shall also be responsible for presenting regular reports of the account balances, revenues, and expenses of the church at regular Members' Meetings.

Clause 2. The Treasurer shall be selected to a renewable term of one year upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of a majority of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Clause 3. No Person shall serve more than three consecutive terms as Treasurer.

Clause 4. No Elder, or paid staff member of the church, nor the deacon of finance, shall be eligible for the office of Treasurer.

Clause 5. The Treasurer shall be removed from office upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of a majority of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting.

Section 3.

Clause 1. Other paid staff positions may be created or dissolved by elders.

Clause 2. Paid staff positions of a pastoral nature shall be filled and vacated upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of a majority of the Members present and voting on the question at any Members' Meeting. Elders have authority to fill and vacate paid staff positions not of a pastoral nature.

Clause 3. The Elders shall have primary responsibility for the supervision and evaluation of paid staff members.

Clause 4. A paid staff position does not constitute an Elder's position.

Article 5: Ratification

This Constitution shall be ratified upon the approval of two-thirds of the Members present and voting on the question at any regular Members' Meeting of the church, and shall take effect upon the recognition by the congregation of at least three Elders.

Article 6: Amendments

Section 1.

The Statement of Faith or Church Covenant shall be amended upon the recommendation of the Elders and the subsequent agreement of three-quarters of the Members voting on the question at any regular Members' Meeting, provided the Amendment shall have been offered in writing at any previous regular Members' Meeting, and shall have been announced at every public meeting of the church for two weeks immediately prior to final consideration. Any Member serving under the commission of this church on an international mission field shall also be eligible to vote by correspondence on this question.

Section 2.

This Constitution shall be amended by a vote of three-quarters of the Members voting on the question at any regular Members' Meeting, provided the Amendment shall have been offered in writing at any previous regular Members' Meeting, and shall have been announced at every public meeting of the church for two weeks immediately prior to final consideration. Any Member serving under the commission of this church on an international mission field shall also be eligible to vote by correspondence with elders on this question.