



CONSTITUTION

of

BIBLE FELLOWSHIP ASSEMBLY

adopted January 2007

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INDEX

<u>Article</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Name	2
2. Purpose	2
3. Statement of Faith & Doctrine	2
4. Covenant of Membership	6
5. Government	7
6. Affiliation	7
7. Membership	7
8. Adherents	8
9. Business Meetings of the Membership	8
10. The Credentialed Pastoral Team	9
11. Church Officers	9
12. Selection of Officers	10
13. Board of Management	11
14. Ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper	11
15. Discipline	12
16. Fiscal Year	12
17. Finance	12
18. Amendments	12
19. Robert's Rules of Order	13
20. Dissolution	13
Notes	13

**CONSTITUTION
OF
BIBLE FELLOWSHIP ASSEMBLY
REVISED 2007**

1. NAME

This body shall be known as **Bible Fellowship Assembly**. It will be further referred to in the constitution and by-laws as the “Church”. The church office is presently located at 756 Fifth Line, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. The Church shall have the full power and authority to change the principal office from one location to another.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this church is to glorify God by obeying the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:36-40) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). The process is designed to produce disciples of Jesus Christ which involves at least the following four categories:

1. Worship - (Celebrating) “to love God with all your heart...” (Mt 22:36-40)
2. Ministry – (Caring) “Love your neighbour as yourself...” (Mt 22:36-40)
3. Evangelism – (Cultivating) “Go...and make disciples...” (Mt 28:18-20)
4. Discipleship – (Communicating) “...teach them to observe...” (Mt 28:18-20)

3. STATEMENT OF FAITH & DOCTRINE

a. **The Trinity of the Godhead**

We believe in one God, Creator of all, holy, sovereign, eternal, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, existing in three equal Persons; The Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit.

Genesis 1:26,27; 3:22; 11:6-8; Isaiah 63:8-10; Matthew 28:19,20; John 1:1-4; Acts 5:3-4; 11
Corinthians 13:1; Mark 12:9; Revelation 1:4-6; Heb 1:1-3

Father: We believe that the Father is the first Person of the Trinity, the Father in relation to His creation, and the Heavenly Father of redeemed individuals.

Acts 17:28,29; Romans 1:19, 20; John 1:12,13; John 20:117

Christ: We believe that Jesus Christ is the second Person of the Trinity, is God, exists eternally with the Father in His pre-incarnate glory, was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died a substitutionary death, arose bodily, ascended triumphantly, mediates between God and man, and will personally return.

Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-23; Luke 1:35; John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:8

The Holy Spirit: We believe that the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Trinity, is God, convicts of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, regenerates,

sanctifies, illuminates, and comforts those who believe in Jesus Christ and gives gifts to members of the body.

John 7:38,39; John 14:16,17; John 15:26; John 16:8-15; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4

b. **Bible**

We believe the Bible to be the complete Word of God; that the sixty-six books, as originally written comprising the Old and New Testaments, were verbally inspired by the Spirit of God and, therefore, entirely free from error; that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice and the true basis of Christian union with believers. The truth of the Scripture is the final court of appeal for all doctrinal and personal matters.

II Timothy 3:16,17; II Peter 1:21; Acts 1:16; Hebrew 4:12; Mark 12:26-36

c. **Satan**

We believe that Satan exists as an evil person who is the source of all evil and is the most powerful enemy of God and man, that he will be overcome by the Lord Jesus Christ as the seed of the woman, and cast into the Bottomless Pit for 1000 years, and finally committed to the Lake of Fire with all his angels to be tormented for eternity.

Job 1:6-12; Genesis 3:15; John 8:44; 11 Cor 11:13-15; Eph 6:12-16; Rev 20:1-3, 7-10

d. **Man**

We believe that God created man in His own image, without sin, that he sinned, becoming guilty before God, resulting in total inability to restore himself to right standing with God, thereby incurring physical and spiritual death. We believe that this spiritual death, or corruption of human nature, has been transmitted to the entire human race, Christ excepted, and hence every person is born into this world with a sinful nature.

Genesis 1:26,27; Genesis 2:17; Genesis 6:5; Romans 5:12-19; Isaiah 6:8; 64:6; Eph 2:1-3; 1 Jn 3:8; 1 Timothy 5:6; John 5:40; 6:53; John 3:6; Romans 5:12-19

e. **Salvation**

I. The Redemption of the Blood of Christ:

We believe that our redemption has been accomplished solely by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was made to be sin, and made a curse for us, dying in our place, a Sacrifice wholly acceptable to God and effectual for every sinner who receives Him.

Leviticus 7:11; Matthew 26:28; John 1:12; Romans 5:6-9; Galatians 3:13; Ephesians 1:7; I Peter 1:18,19; I Peter 2:24; II Corinthians 5:21

II. Salvation by Grace through Faith

We believe that sinners are saved by grace (undeserved favour of God) through faith alone. We further believe that every saved person is justified (given the right standing with God).

Acts 13:39; Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 5:1; 3:25-26; Titus 2:11-14

III. The Believer's Security and Assurance

We believe in eternal security of all who are actually born again by the Spirit of God through faith in Christ as revealed in the Scriptures, and that it is the privilege of all such to be assured of their present salvation and eternal safety.

John 10:28; II Timothy 1:12; Romans 8:33-39; John 5:24; Philippians 1:6; Hebrews 10:24
1 John 5:10-13

f. **Baptism with the Holy Spirit**

We believe that when the Holy Spirit came upon the whole company of believers on the Day of Pentecost as promised by Christ, they were collectively baptized into one body, which was the birth of the Church, the Body of Christ. Since that time this baptism occurs individually at the moment of salvation, at which time the believer is also indwelt by the Spirit.

We believe that the New Testament distinguishes between being indwelt by the Spirit, which is true of all believers, and being filled with the Spirit, which is the believer's privilege and duty, producing power in Christian witness. There is one baptism with the spirit, and it is into the Body of Christ, but there are many fillings.

John 14:15-18; 1 Cor 3:16; Romans 8:9; Matthew 3:11; 1 Cor 12:13; Ephesians 5:18; Acts 2:4; 4:8-31; Ephesians 1:13-14

g. **The Gifts of the Holy Spirit**

We believe that the Holy Spirit administers spiritual gifts to the church to glorify Christ in the building of His body. We believe that God, the Holy Spirit, is sovereign in the bestowing of His gifts for the perfecting of the saints for the work of their ministry, and that it is not God's will that any one gift should be given to all believers, although all believers have at least one gift.

We believe that whenever spiritual gifts are exercised, they should always be within the limits expressly given in the Scriptures (e.g. 1 Corinthians 14:23-40). We believe that in the early church speaking in tongues (a human language unknown to the speaker), and the working of miracles were sign gifts demonstrated primarily to authenticate God's revelation through the apostles and the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We believe that today such signs are not necessary to give evidence of the baptism or of the filling of the Spirit, nor are they a mark of spiritual maturity. We believe that special divine revelation for authoritative Scripture ceased with the Apostolic Age.

Acts 2:1-13; Hebrews 2:3-4; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Ephesians 2:20; Romans 12:3-8; John 14:26; 1 Peter 4:7-11; Galatians 1:8-9; Ephesians 4:11-13; Revelation 22:18-29; 11 Corinthians 12:12

h. **Future Things**

We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just at Christ Return, and the unjust after Christ's thousand year reign, in the eternal blessedness of the redeemed and in the judgment and eternal conscious punishment of the wicked.

We believe that the personal and glorious return of the Lord Jesus Christ to translate His Church is imminent and that this event concludes the present age of grace. This will be followed by the out-pouring of God's wrath on the earth, known as the Tribulation. After this, Christ's Millennial Kingdom will be established and "...the

earth shall be filled with knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14, Isaiah 11:9). At the conclusion of His Millennial Reign, Christ will deliver up the Kingdom to God, the Father, that the Triune God may be all in all.

John 14: 1-3; John 5:28,29; I Corinthians 15: 51-54; I Thessalonians 4:13-17; II Peter 2:9; Revelation 19:11-16 (19 & 20); Revelation 20:4,5

i. **The Universal Church**

We believe that the church universal is composed of all who are united by the Holy Spirit to the risen and ascended Son of God, and that “by one spirit we are all baptized into one body whether we be Jews or Gentiles”, thus being members one of another and thus knit together in love.

Romans 12:5; Ephesians 4:3-10; I Corinthians 12:12-27; Colossians 2:19

j. **The Local Church**

We believe that the local church is a company of believers, called out from the world, separated unto the Lord Jesus Christ, voluntarily associated for the ministry of the Word, the mutual edification of its members, the propagation of the faith, and the observance of the ordinances. We believe it is a self-governing, independent body under the Lordship of Christ.

I Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 5:25-27; Acts 13:2; Acts 15:28

k. **The Lord’s Day**

We believe that the first day of the week is the Lord’s Day and that, in a special sense, it is the divinely appointed day of worship and spiritual exercise.

Matthew 28:1; Acts 20:6,7; I Corinthians 16:2

l. **Civil Government**

We believe that civil government is of divine appointment for the interest and good order of society; that magistrates are to be prayed for, conscientiously honored and obeyed, except only in the things opposed to the will of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only Lord of the conscience and Prince of the Kings of the earth.

Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1; I Peter 2:13; Matthew 22:21

m. **Ordinances**

We believe that there are only two ordinances for the believer: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

I. Baptism which is the immersion of the believer in water, whereby he obeys Christ’s command and symbolically proclaims his identification with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection.

Matthew 28:19, 20; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:12; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3

II. The Lord’s Supper which is regularly observed as the memorial wherein the believer partakes of the two elements, bread and wine, which symbolize the Lord’s body and shed blood, proclaiming His death until He comes.

Luke 22:19,20; I Corinthians 11:23-27

m. **Dedication**

We believe that it is the privilege of parents to present their children in dedication to the Lord before the assembly that both parents and children may be made the subject of united and solemn prayer.

Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17; Proverbs 22:6

4. **COVENANT OF MEMBERSHIP**

We confess Jesus Christ to be our Lord and Savior in the presence of all. We give ourselves wholeheartedly to His Word as the guide of our life. As such, and having been united by saving faith to Him, we now, as a Church of Christ, unite with one another in this covenant, and that we will follow the New Testament principles of the Church of Jesus Christ which we understand includes:

- Walking together in Christian love and seek to be a practical help and encouragement to one another. We will not bring to the church a complaint against any member for personal offense until we have taken the first two steps pointed out by Christ in Matthew 18:15-17. In this way we will endeavor to settle all private offenses without making the matter a public issue.¹
- Seeking to lead people to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, through personal example and spoken word, both at home and abroad.²
- Searching the Scriptures that we might walk according to the will of God and promote spiritual growth in our church, our family, and ourselves.³
- Faithfully attending the regular meetings for worship, prayer, ministry of the Word, Lord's Supper, and fellowship.⁴
- Contributing cheerfully to the expenses and ministry at home and abroad, and the relief of the poor.⁵
- Praying always with thanksgiving for the work, the salvation of the lost, the ministry of the Word, the assembly, the healing of the sick and for every need and benefit.⁶
- We will endeavor to live authentic Christian lives in true godliness, abstaining from any conduct that would bring reproach upon the Name of Christ; being a poor testimony for God's people; possibly leading a brother astray; or influencing the unsaved against the gospel; or harming the testimony of a brother or sister in the Lord.⁷
- Doing good to all men, especially born again believers.⁸

Notes:

1. John 13:35; Romans 12:9, 10; I John 4:20

2. Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15,16; Romans 10:9,10; Acts 1:8

3. Acts 17:11; Acts 2:42; I Peter 2:2; II Timothy 2:15; I Corinthians 3:1-3; Joshua 1:8

4. Acts 2:42; Hebrews 10:25; Psalm 122:1

5. Matthew 6:2,3; Acts 2:44,45; Luke 6:38; II Corinthians 9:7
6. Luke 18:1; Ephesians 1:17-20; James 5:14; Ephesians 6:18,19; Colossians 4:3
7. Romans 14: 7,8; Romans 14: 15-21; Philippians 1:27; I Peter 1:15; I Timothy 4:12
8. Galatians 6:10; Romans 12:13; Acts 2:44, 45.

5. **GOVERNMENT**

The government shall be vested in the body of believers constituting the membership of the Church, exercised at regular or special meetings, or through officers appointed, or other duly constituted agencies, and according to this Constitution as amended from time to time.

6. **AFFILIATION**

The Church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its own affairs, independent of any denomination control. Recognizing, however, the benefits of cooperation with other churches, the Church voluntarily affiliates with the Associated Gospel Churches of Canada.

7. **MEMBERSHIP**

- a. For the scriptural definition of the Local Church, hereinafter called ‘the Church’, see Article ‘i’ of the Statement of Faith.
- b. **Membership Committee:** The Membership Committee shall consist of the pastor and elders.
- c. **Membership List:** The Church will maintain a list of members. The membership list shall be reviewed annually by the Membership Committee.
- d. **Qualifications for Membership:** Persons desiring to unite with this congregation upon profession of their faith shall be examined by the Membership Committee as to their:
 - i. Christian experience,
 - ii. the basis of their salvation,
 - iii. and to their being in basic agreement with the statement of faith and covenant of membership.

Those with letters of recommendation from other evangelical churches shall present them in person to the Committee. Applicants whose examination is satisfactory will be recommended to the Church for membership.

- e. **Acceptance and Recognition of Membership:** Names of those persons recommended by the Committee for acceptance shall be posted in the bulletin. If no objection has been lodged with the Membership Committee, such applicants shall be received publicly into the membership of the Church.

All objections shall be referred to and dealt with by the Membership Committee.

- f. Termination of Membership: A member's name may be deleted from the membership list if any of the following conditions occur:
 - i. They move to another area and therefore are transferred by letter of recommendation.
 - ii. They are called home to heaven.
 - iii. They withdraw voluntarily.
 - iv. They are asked to withdraw as a matter of discipline, for conduct inconsistent with the articles of this constitution. Cf. I Corinthians 5:11-13.
 - v. They are absent from the regular services for a period of one year without giving satisfactory reason for such absence.
- g. Rights of Membership: Every member shall have the right to participate in, and if aged 18 or older is entitled to vote on, the following activities of the church:
 - i. The annual budget
 - ii. The disposition of all or substantially all of the assets of the Church.
 - iii. The merger or dissolution of the Church.
 - iv. Acquisition of property.
 - v. Amendments to the Constitution and the Bylaws of the Church.
- h. Required Membership: Membership is required for officers of the Church, committee chairs, Sunday school superintendent and teachers, and leader of any of the Church's ministries.

8. ADHERENTS

Persons who regularly attend the services of the Church, but who are not members, shall be considered adherents. Adherents do not have the right to vote on any business arising at any of the regular or special meetings of the membership, .

9. BUSINESS MEETINGS OF THE MEMBERSHIP

- a. Annual Meeting: The annual meeting of the membership to receive and adopt the annual report, the Church budget, the election of officers, and the transaction of general business shall be held in the month of January each year.
- b. Periodic and Special Meetings Called by Leadership: Periodic and Special meetings of the membership may be called by the pastor or by the Board of Management and shall be duly constituted.
- c. Special Meetings Called by Membership: Special meetings may be called by the membership if 15% of the membership is in agreement with such a meeting and shall be duly constituted.

- d. Voting/Approving at Meetings: Only items identified in the notification can be voted upon by the membership at a business meeting
- e. Notification of Meetings: Notification of members for business meetings may be given by any one of the following methods:
 - i. Oral announcement to the congregation on each of the two preceding Sundays.
 - ii. Distribution of written material to the congregation in attendance on each of the two preceding Sundays.
 - iii. By first-class letter to all of the members.
- f. Quorum: A quorum shall consist of those members present and voting. ¹

10. THE CREDENTIALLED PASTORAL TEAM²

- a. The Lead Pastor shall be chosen by at least a two-thirds vote of the membership present at a meeting duly called for the purpose and shall be a person approved and accepted as a Pastor by the Associated Gospel Churches' Doctrine and Credentials Committee. In addition to, or in conjunction with, the preceding AGC requirements the pastor shall also illustrate the qualities of an elder as outlined by the scriptures (Titus 1:5-9; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-4) and as such shall be considered to hold the office of an elder in the church.

The lead pastor is vested with the oversight of the pastoral team.

- b. Any other pastoral team members (associate, youth, CE directors, etc.) shall be chosen by at least a two-thirds vote of the membership present at a meeting duly called for the purpose and shall be a person approved and accepted by the Associated Gospel Churches' Doctrine and Credentials Committee. Though it is not a requirement of other pastoral team members, individual members can hold the office of deacon or elder as defined under the respective offices.
- c. Pastors and pastoral team members must give a minimum of 30 days notice of resignation. In the case of dismissal for cause, at least a two-thirds vote of the membership is required at a duly constituted meeting called for that purpose.

11. CHURCH OFFICERS

The officers of the Church shall be the following:

- a. The Elders shall not be less than three in number, one of whom is the Lead Pastor. They shall constitute the Elders Board, having the spiritual oversight of the work and ministry of the congregation. They shall assist in the ordinances of the church and perform such other spiritual offices as the Word assigns.

As the spiritual leaders of the local church, elders must be men who are desirous of the office of elder (I Tim., 3:1), who, by their lives and service to others, illustrate the qualities required by the Scriptures (Titus 1:5-9; I Tim. 3:1-7; I Peter 5:1-4); and who have the availability to accomplish the defined responsibilities.

As a leader among leaders the Lead Pastor shall have the gifts and experience deemed necessary to enable him to give such leadership.

- b. **The Deacons** shall not be less than 3 in number. They shall be responsible for the conduct of all administrative business of the church and have general oversight and management of the church properties. Deacons shall give oversight to practical needs within the membership (e.g. financial or practical assistance, transportation, etc. – in the spirit of Acts 6:1-3).

The qualifications for this ministry shall be those found in Acts 6:3; 1 Tim. 3:8-13. This office may be filled by men or women (see Rom. 16:1).

- c. **The Treasurer** shall be responsible for, and keep an accurate account of the receiving, recording, banking and disbursing of the regular funds of the congregation and shall prepare monthly, quarterly and year-end statements for the Board of Management. He/she shall supply the auditor with such records as may be required when auditing the church books.
- d. **The Trustees** shall not be less than two in number. Trustees shall remain in office until such time as they resign, decease, or are dismissed by the church. They shall hold the church property in trust for the church, and shall sign legal documents on behalf of the church as the assembly may direct. They shall be responsible for the safe-keeping of all legal and valuable items of the church.
- e. **The Clerk** shall keep a proper record of all meetings of the membership and the Board of Management, conduct the correspondence and keep the custody of all papers and documents of the congregation. He/she shall keep an accurate register of all members of the church, which shall include the date of actual recognition.
- g. **The Lead Pastor** (see Articles 11a, 12(1) and 13a)
- h. **Board of Management Member:**

12. **SELECTION OF OFFICERS**

- 1 The Elders and Deacons of the Church (excluding the Lead Pastor) shall be elected annually at the annual meeting of the membership, having been first nominated, in the manner following:
 - a The Nominating Committee shall consist of three or four members, one of whom will be an elder (excluding the pastor). The elder shall be selected by the elders and the remaining members shall volunteer from the membership at the congregational meeting immediately preceding the annual meeting, or after a regular church service not less than one month before the annual meeting.
 - b A list of the nominations made by this committee shall be posted in three conspicuous places in and about the place of worship at least two Sundays before the annual meeting.

- c After the list is posted, further nominations may be made in writing. Each such nomination must be signed by three members in good standing and left with the Chairman of the Committee not later than seven days prior to the annual meeting. If the persons so nominated are found to be eligible, their names shall be added by the Nominating Committee to the nominations already posted.
 - d The ballot shall be prepared in such a manner that each nominee is listed and can be voted upon individually.
 - e A vote of at least two-thirds of the members in attendance at the annual meeting is required to be an elder or deacon.
- 2 The Board of Management, Treasurer, Clerk, and Trustees shall be appointed by the Elders and Deacons after their election and before the next scheduled meeting of the Board of Management.

13. BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

- a. The Board of Management of the Church shall be made up of the following officers: The Lead Pastor, a minimum of 2 other Elders, a minimum of 3 Deacons, and the Clerk; with the maximum number on the Board determined by the Elders³. They will elect a chairman at their first meeting of the year from amongst the elders sitting on the Board (excluding the Lead Pastor or other paid staff).

Members of the pastoral staff, committee chairs, treasurer, elders, deacons, and Board invited guests who are not Board members may be asked to attend the Board's meetings ex officio (that is without official vote).

- b. The maximum term a person (excluding the lead pastor and clerk) can serve on the Board is 3 consecutive years; with a minimum 1 year leave.
- c. The Board of Management shall exercise executive authority and supervision over the entire work of the congregation on both its spiritual and business side. Committees may be created by the Board and will receive direction from and be accountable to the Board.
- d. Only Elders and Deacons will have a vote on the Board.⁴
- e. Meetings of the Board of Management shall be held at regular monthly or quarterly intervals and special meetings at the call of the lead pastor or board chairman.

14. ORDINANCES OF BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

We believe that our Lord and Savior clearly prescribed for His believing disciples the ordinances of Baptism by immersion and the Lord's Supper. The one as a symbol and proclamation of the sinner's death to sin and his newness of life in Christ Jesus; the other as a memorial of the Lord's death to be kept by His disciples until He comes again, according to His promise and the Father's revealed plan.

15. DISCIPLINE

Disciplining of offending members is for the well-being of the body of Christ, and is governed by the Scriptures (Matthew 18:15-17).

The discipline of a member shall be exercised by the Board of Management according to the following principles (and as further elaborated upon in the Policies and Procedures Manual):

- a. In any case of offence not calling for removal from membership, the offender will be summoned before the pastor and elders and dealt with according to the Word of God, and if, after full enquiry, prayer and counsel together, the offender does not admit his/her sin and change their ways, the pastor and elders may suspend him from the privileges of membership including the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper for such time as they shall be led to fix.
- b. If the offence calls for removal from the membership (e.g. heresy, immorality, divisiveness), or if the offender refuses to comply with the provisions of the Word of God in such a case, the matter may be brought by the pastor and elders before the Board of Management. The said Board, by a two-thirds vote, shall recommend to the membership that the offender's name be removed from the roll of active members.

16. FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year end of the Church will be December 31.

17. FINANCE

The Church shall be carried on without purpose of gain for its members and any profits or other accretions to the organization shall be used in promoting its objects. In this connection the tithing system is recommended as a basis of proportionate giving on the part of each member of the congregation.

The church financial records shall be looked at by a third party every year.

18. AMENDMENTS

Proposed amendments to this Constitution must originate with the Board of Management or be submitted through the Board of Management of the Church. At least two weeks notice must be given to the membership of any meeting at which proposed amendments will be considered, and the details of the amendments must be clearly stated. At least a two-thirds affirmative vote of the membership present at a meeting duly called for this purpose will be required before any such amendments can be adopted.

19. ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER

Where not specifically covered elsewhere in the constitution, Robert's Rules of Order shall govern the conduct of meetings.

20. DISSOLUTION

Should at any time the church be dissolved, it should be done by a two-thirds affirmative vote of its membership. The building and property are to be sold and all debts paid. None of its assets or holding shall be divided among the members, but shall be irrevocably dedicated by the trustees to such non-profit religious corporations as are in agreement with the letter and spirit of this constitution's Statement of Faith and Doctrine.

Notes:

1. Quorum made up of those present at a business meeting of the church membership instead of a certain percentage of the membership (i.e. 51%) was chosen since only items identified in the Notification of Meeting can be voted upon by the membership at a business meeting. Important items requiring a vote (i.e. a new pastor) will garner greater turnout and therefore ensure representation by a larger percentage of the membership. Smaller items that require a vote (i.e. change the church logo) will therefore not be hampered by smaller membership turnout.
2. This item only covers credentialed pastors who may or may not be paid employees of the church. Other paid uncredentialed employees are not addressed by this item.
3. The elders are to determine the maximum number of elders and deacons that sit on the Board in order to make the Board functional. Too many Board members would make decision making difficult. The Board size should be determined prior to the annual election to facilitate selection of the Board after the annual meeting.
4. Clerk may or may not be an elder or deacon and therefore not have been elected by the congregation.