

Key Steps in the Process

1. Gather guides like this and sample documents to assist you.
2. Create a pastor-led team to formulate your documents.
3. Formulate basic versions to secure your Articles of Incorporation.
4. Expand these versions to reflect your uniqueness as a church.
5. Be open to revisions and refinements in the collaborative effort.
6. Present final version to church family with two weeks to review.
7. Schedule a Q & A session, and allow ample time for discussion.
8. Secure a minimum of 75% majority to adopt the documents.
9. Use the same process for annual revisions and updates.

A Guide to Formulate Your Church Constitution, Bylaws & Policy Manual



Suggested Clauses for Your Constitution or Bylaws re: Marriage & Family Issues

"We believe that marriage was ordained by God at creation as the sacred union of one man and one woman. All sexual relations must, therefore, be reserved for that union. Christian marriage is a representation of Christ's relationship to His church. We also believe that children are a blessing from the Lord. Thus, all human life is sacred and worthy of protection from the moment of conception." (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:24; Psalm 127 & 128; 139:13-16; Matthew 19:1-10; I Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 5:22-33; Hebrew 13:4)

"Clergy in this church are not authorized to perform same-sex wedding ceremonies or civil unions, and will only perform covenant marriage ceremonies for one man and one woman as biologically designed and revealed at birth." (protects them re: transgender issues)

"Membership in this church shall be reserved for those who voluntarily agree to sign our church covenant, and thus declare that they whole-heartedly agree with our understanding of Biblical morality and ethics that clearly define abortion and homosexuality as sins against God, and that any deviation from this view and practice shall be grounds for the termination of their membership in this local church."

"Church facilities and resources shall not be used for same-sex weddings or civil ceremonies."

"Any effort by civil authority to require any clergy, staff, official or member of this church to violate these provisions of our church constitution, shall be viewed as an attack on our religious liberties and First Amendment rights as expressed in the Constitution of the United States, and will thereby lead to the only alternative left for us— engaging in civil disobedience by refusing to comply with their demands, irrespective of the penalties, consequences and cultural stigma that may result — as an act of faith that testifies: "We must obey God, rather than men." (Acts 5:29)

The Church Constitution

contains an enumerated list of "articles" that provide an overview of your legal identity, theological grounding, philosophy of ministry, and general church structure. The articles should include:

1. Name of church, address, and date of establishment.
2. Purpose of the church based on Scripture.
3. Statement of Faith; Baptist Faith & Message.
4. Denominational and/or other affiliations.
5. Church polity re: authority and decision-making.
6. Officers of the corporation and registered agent.
7. Church position on social issues: abortion, homosexuality.
8. Procedure for church discipline.
9. Procedure for revisions to the Constitution and Bylaws.
10. Procedure for dissolution.

The Church Constitution is a foundational document and, therefore, should be designed to be rarely revised, unlike the Bylaws and Policy Manual to follow, both of which deal with more specific operations. The two latter documents should be designed to be a bit more fluid and more easily updated in our changing times. This is why it is best to create three separate documents.

The Bylaws

outline structure, operations and procedures. Unlike the Constitution, this document should be readily amendable by pastors, or elder, deacon, staff, or special committee. Items to be included may be:

Membership issues

1. Receiving members (Statement of Faith; Baptism; Transfer of letter).
2. Duties of church members.
3. Rights of church members.
4. Discipline of church members.
5. Membership termination (Granting letters of transfer; Disfellowship).
6. Nonresident membership.
7. Restoration of membership.

General church officers

1. Pastor: Selection and call procedures; job description.
2. Staff: Selection and call procedures; duties; organizational chart.
3. Elders and/or Deacons: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.
4. Moderator: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.
5. Clerk: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.
6. Financial secretary: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.
7. Treasurer: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.
8. Trustees: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.
9. Church council: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.
10. Other officers: Selection procedures; duties; rotation.

Church committees or ministry teams

1. Perpetual: types; selection process; duties; rotation.
2. Temporary: types; selection process; duties; rotation.

Church ministry structure

1. Prayer & missions: purpose; leadership; strategy.
2. Outreach & evangelism: purpose; leadership; strategy.
3. Sunday School: purpose; leadership; strategy.
4. Discipleship: purpose; leadership; strategy.
5. Worship & music: purpose; leadership; strategy.
6. Other: Children; purpose; leadership; strategy.
7. Ordinance of believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Church gatherings

1. Worship: Days; Leadership; Planning; Style.
2. Business: Rules of order; Moderator; Quorum.
3. Special services: Revivals; Conferences; Clinics; etc.

Church procedures *

1. Licensing; Ordination.
2. Safety protocols.
3. Financial protocols.
4. Conflict resolution protocols.
5. Appeals to leadership.
6. Staff dismissal protocols.
7. Mission trip protocols.
8. Project funding protocols.

** This section could go in the Policy Manual, or vice versa.*

The Policy Manual

seeks to standardize best practices and protect the church from inefficiency and legal vulnerability. It may address issues such as:

1. Personnel policies: vacations; holidays; sick leave; evaluations, etc.
2. Facilities usage by members and outsiders: receptions; parties; exercise classes; garage sales; car washes; sales; seminars; etc.
3. Use of office equipment, vehicles, kitchen items, etc.
4. Borrowing tables, chairs, coffee makers, etc., for off-site usage.
5. Child supervision on site: by parents and teachers; before, during, and after services; in all interior and exterior venues.