

# **CONSTITUTION of PROVIDENCE CHURCH OF TEXAS**

## **Preamble**

There are many good reasons why a New Testament Church should have a Church Constitution, a Statement of Faith, a Church Covenant and Philosophy of Ministry. Together they can greatly assist us in the efforts of biblically organizing and conducting the ministries which have been entrusted to us by the Head of our church, Jesus Christ. It must be readily acknowledged, however, that these documents, despite their usefulness and precision, will avail nothing apart from the presence, power, and direction of the Spirit of God in this church. It is with this keen awareness of our absolute dependence upon our great God that these articles are set forth. These articles are also a living document and may be changed and/or amended to reflect the direction of the church when led by God. The text herein is not under copyright, since we are indebted to other churches, both past and present, for many of the biblical insights embodied in this document.

We, the charter members of Providence Church, do hereby establish and adopt the following articles as the constitution to which we and all subsequent members do voluntarily covenant to submit ourselves.

## **Article 1: Name**

The name of this local assembly shall be Providence Church of Texas. This name reflects our commitment to the declaration of Scripture that God, the benevolent Creator of all things, upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures and things by His wise and holy providence for the purpose for which He created them. We hereby state with confidence and without fear of refutation our conviction that Providence Church was birthed, exists, and will be directed and sustained by the awesome providence of our sovereign God.

## **Article 2: Purpose**

This church exists by the grace of God, for the glory of God, which shall be the ultimate purpose in all its activities. This church glorifies God by loving Him and obeying His commands through: Worshipping Him; Equipping the saints through Bible instruction and study; Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ through preaching and personal evangelism, and any other means consistent with the teachings of Holy Scripture; Encouraging, supporting, and participating in missions work (local, domestic, and international); Administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper; Encouraging biblical fellowship among believers; Serving other individuals, families, and churches by providing for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, in the name of Jesus Christ; and Calling fellow churches to biblical faithfulness and purity through instruction and encouragement about the nature of the local church.

## **Article 3: Membership**

### **Section 1 – Qualifications**

To qualify for membership in this church, a person must be a believer in Jesus Christ who gives evidence of regeneration, who has been baptized, in obedience to Christ, following his or

her regeneration, and who wholeheartedly believes in the Christian faith as revealed in the Bible. Each member must agree to submit to the teaching of Scripture as expressed in our Statement of Faith and must promise to keep the commitments expressed in the Church Covenant. The elders shall be responsible for determining each person's qualification for membership. In making this determination, they may rely on a person's profession of faith, or such other evidence, as the elders deem appropriate.

## Section 2 – Admission of Members

To be admitted into church membership, applicants shall be recommended by the elders for admission and accepted by vote of the members at any regular or special meeting of the members, and shall at that point relinquish their membership in other churches.

## Section 3 – Duties and Privileges of Membership

In accord with the duties enumerated in the Church Covenant, each member shall be privileged and expected to participate in and contribute to the ministry and life of the church, consistent with God's leading and with the gifts, time, and material resources each has received from God. Only those shall be entitled to serve in the ministries of the church who are members of this congregation; non-members may serve on an ad-hoc basis with the approval of the elders. Notwithstanding, non-members may serve the church for purposes of administration and professional consultation.

Members are expected to be in voluntary submission to the doctrinal position of the church and the elders as those elders carry out the functions of their office and to give regularly to the church of their time, talents, and finances as God providentially enables for its support and its causes.

Under Christ, this congregation is governed by its members. Therefore, it is the privilege and responsibility of members to attend all members' meetings and vote on the election of officers, on decisions regarding membership status, and on such other matters as may be submitted to a vote. Any member in good standing who is at least eighteen years of age shall be considered a voting member.

## Section 4 – On Church Discipline

Any member consistently neglectful of his or her duties or guilty of conduct by which the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be dishonored, and so opposing the welfare of the church, shall be subject to the admonition of the elders and the discipline of the church, according to the instructions of our Lord in Matthew 18:15–17 and the example of Scripture (i.e., a believer goes alone to lovingly confront one who has sinned against him or her in hope of repentance, which is followed by taking two or three witnesses if necessary, and ultimately the church is sought to correct if each previous stage fails to achieve repentance). Church discipline, then, should ordinarily be contemplated after individual private admonition has failed.

Church discipline can include admonition by the elders or congregation, suspension from communion for a definite period, deposition from office, and excommunication (*cf.* Matthew 18:15–17; 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15; 1 Timothy 5:19–20; 1 Corinthians 5:4–5).

The purpose of such discipline should be for the repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual growth of the individual disciplined; For the instruction in righteousness and good of other Christians, as an example to them; For the purity of the church as a whole; For the good of our corporate witness to non-Christians; and supremely for the glory of God by reflecting His holy character.

## Section 5 – Termination of Membership

Termination of membership shall be recognized by the church following the death or voluntary resignation of any church member. Membership may be terminated as an act of church discipline at the recommendation of the elders and with the vote of two-thirds of the members at any regular or special meeting of the members.

## **Article 4: Meetings**

### Section 1 – Worship Meetings

Worship services shall be held each Lord's Day, and may be held throughout the week as the church determines. Unless providentially hindered, members are expected to support the church through faithful attendance in participation, which fosters community.

### Section 2 – Members' meetings

In every meeting together, members shall act in that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration which is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The elders shall ensure that there shall be a regular members' meeting at least once per quarter, at some time apart from a public worship service. It is intended that members be given reasonable notice of the meeting and when possible prior knowledge of items that might require considerable thought and/or prayer. Reports shall be given by the elders and other responsible members to keep the congregation informed, as well as to facilitate discussion and open dialogue. However, the elder moderating the meeting shall ensure proper Christian decorum and general order.

Provided all constitutional provisions for notification have been met, a quorum shall be understood to be met by those members present. All votes shall be tallied based on the number of votes cast by members present.

A budget shall be approved by the membership at a members' meeting neither more than three months nor less than one month prior to the start of the fiscal year.

At any regular or special members' meeting, officers may be elected and positions filled as needed, so long as all relevant constitutional requirements have been met.

Special members' meetings may be called as required by the elders, or at the written request, submitted to the elders, of five percent of the voting membership. The date, time, and purpose of any special meeting shall be announced at all public services of the church within two weeks preceding the meeting. In the event of a written request from the members, the elders shall call a special meeting to be held within one month of their receipt of the request.

## **Article 5: Congregational Organization**

### Section 1 – Summary

Providence Church is an autonomous (i.e., self-governing) body of born again believers in covenant union with the Lord Jesus Christ, each one having been spiritually baptized into His body, the Church, with the Holy Spirit in the new birth.

According to the regulations of Scripture, the officers of the church are elders and deacons. The elders are under-shepherds and overseers for the flock and the deacons are the officially recognized servants in the local church, both being God's gifts to His church. In general, elders are tasked more with the spiritual and the deacons more with the physical aspects of ministry. It is expected that church officers will lead by example, which includes financially giving, with tithing as the ideal minimum. In addition to the officers, the church will recognize

other administrative positions as needed in the life of the church (e.g., clerk & treasurer). With the exception of the (senior) pastor, all church officers and the administrative positions of clerk and treasurer must be members of Providence Church at least one year prior to assuming their responsibilities.

## Section 2 – Elders

Subject to the will of the congregation, the elders shall oversee the ministry and resources of the church. The elders shall be comprised of not less than four men who shall satisfy the biblical qualifications for the office of elder (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9). While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of elder is limited to men by Scripture. A majority of the eldership shall be composed of church members not under the employ of the church, and no elder shall hold the office of deacon during his tenure. A vote of consensus minus one will constitute an action of the elder board.

The authority of the elders is divinely-delegated authority. Thus, elders are answerable to God for the exercise of this authority as is emphatically noted in Acts 20:28 and Hebrews 13:17. However, they also serve and are accountable to the church. The elders shall exercise oversight over the church ministries and functions and have the general oversight over all of this church's affairs. The conduct of all church business and the work of all church organizations shall be subject to their supervision and oversight. But the authority of the elders does not include the right to make major decisions unilaterally. In major decisions of church life, such as those dealing with corrective discipline, recognition of officers, and major financial decisions and commitments, the local church as a whole has a voice in approving such issues (*cf.* Acts 6:1-6; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5) by vote at regularly scheduled members' meetings.

In keeping with biblical principles (e.g., Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Peter 5:1–4), the elders shall devote their time to prayer, to the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and to leading, guiding, and shepherding God's flock. They shall, assisted by the deacons, administer the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, supervise the processes of congregational discipline (see article 3 above), and lead Providence Church in weekly worship. It shall be the duty of the elders to be diligent and faithful in attendance at the elders' meetings and at the regular services of the church and to supply the pulpit with men whose ministry shall be consistent with the faith of this church.

The church shall recognize men gifted and willing to serve in this office through the following process: elders shall be unanimously recommended by the other elder(s) and approved by a three-fourths majority of the total votes cast at a normally publicized members' meeting. Those approved as elders shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and shall be publicly set aside to fulfill the duties of this office during their terms of office. While potential elders may come from among the deacons (i.e., elders who were formerly deacons), it is not necessary since they are different offices with different requirements, gifts, talents, etc.

Men so ordained may be removed from the elder body by physical death, voluntary resignation, failure to be reelected, removal of membership, or because of geographical relocation. An elder may also be removed for disciplinary reasons upon recommendation of the other elders and a two-thirds majority vote of the votes cast for such deliberation. An elder's term of office shall be three years or may be terminated in a manner described above. Any two members with reason to believe that an elder should be dismissed should express such concern to the elders and, if need be, to the congregation, in accordance with biblical instructions (e.g., Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Timothy 5:17-21). Any of the elders may be dismissed by a two-thirds majority vote of the votes cast at any members' meeting of the church.

The elders shall take particular responsibility to examine and instruct prospective members, examine and recommend all prospective candidates for offices and positions, oversee the work of the deacons and appointed church agents and committees, conduct worship services, administer the ordinances of baptism and communion, equip the membership for the work of the ministry, encourage sound doctrine and practice, admonish and correct error, oversee the process of church discipline, coordinate and promote the ministries of the church, and mobilize the church for world missions. The elders are further to ensure that all who minister the Word to the congregation, including outside speakers, share our fundamental convictions.

The elders may establish ministry positions or other groups as they deem necessary to assist them in fulfilling their responsibilities. The elders may also propose funding for new paid staff positions for congregational approval. The elders, via the (senior) pastor, shall have primary responsibility for the employment, supervision, and evaluation of staff members. This responsibility may, on a case-by-case basis, be delegated to another staff member. The membership, however, shall approve all candidates for the positions of (senior) pastor.

The elders shall annually elect a chairman of elders' meetings and an elder to serve as moderator of members' meetings, who may or may not be the same man. In addition, they shall annually elect three of their number to serve as trustees as the church's legal representatives in transactions so requiring such designees. The trustees are only empowered to perform those functions specifically designated by congregational vote.

An elder will serve the congregation for a three-year term, after which he must be reaffirmed by the congregation by a three-fourths majority of the votes cast at a normally publicized members' meeting, the (senior) pastor being excepted. The congregation will endeavor to stagger terms as able to minimize the potential of drastic turnover on the elder board. After serving two consecutive three-year terms, elders are encouraged to take a year sabbatical from elder duties before seeking reelection to another term.

### Section 3 – The (Senior) Pastor

The (senior) pastor shall be an elder and shall, therefore, perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2. He shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. He shall preach on the Lord's Day, officiate at the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office. Scripture is the authority in defining the duties of the pastor; in the case of conflict or confusion, it is the final court of appeal.

In the event that Providence Church finds itself without the service of a (senior) pastor due to death, dismissal, or resignation, the remaining elders will constitute the search committee. In the absence or incapacity of the (senior) pastor for defined periods of time (e.g., sabbatical or illness), the elders shall temporarily assume the responsibility for his duties, delegating as appropriate. His call shall not be subject to the triennial reaffirmation set out in Article 5, Section 2, for elders. His call shall be defined as per Article 6, Section 3.

### Section 4 – Deacons

In keeping with the biblical teaching regarding the office and qualifications of deacons (e.g., Acts 6:1-7; 1 Timothy 3:10-13), the church shall recognize, in accordance with the constitutional provisions on elections, those who are giving of themselves in service to the church, and who possess particular gifts of service. These members shall be received as gifts of Christ to His church and set apart as deacons. As needed they are to assist the elders in the spiritual unity and growth of the church as gifted by the Holy Spirit and in the administration of church ordinances.

Deacons shall care for the temporal needs of members, attend to the accommodations for public worship, and encourage and support those able to help others and those with gifts of administration. Their duties, under the oversight of the elders, are to minister to the outward needs of the membership of the congregation, showing mercy with cheerfulness to those in special need. They are to care for the material interest of the church; such as buildings and grounds, and to recommend action to the elders pertaining to those interests when needed.

The deacons supervise the collection and recording of church offerings. Furthermore, each year the deacons assist the elders as necessary in compiling an annual budget for congregational approval. The deacons shall receive, hold, and disperse a fund for benevolence, reporting on its use to the elders at their request and to the church when financial statements are presented, but reporting total receipts and disbursements only.

Deacons shall be recognized by the elders, other deacons, and the congregation as possessing the spiritual gifts of and a heart for service. Providence Church is under no obligation to recognize as a deacon anyone who served as such at a previous church. Deacons shall be approved and recommended unanimously by the elders and approved by a three-fourths majority of votes cast at a normally publicized members' meeting. They shall be publicly appointed to fulfill the duties of their office indefinitely and shall be removed from office by death, voluntary resignation, geographic relocation, or disciplinary action. In addition, any of the deacons may be dismissed by a two-thirds majority vote of the members at any members' meeting of the church.

Pending elder approval, deacons shall annually (re)elect from among themselves men suitable to serve as chairman, vice-chairman, and other positions as they deem necessary.

#### Section 5 – Other Administrative Positions

Providence Church shall as needed recognize certain administrative positions needed to assist the elders and/or deacons with the affairs of the church (e.g., clerk and treasurer). These positions may be filled by an elder or deacon or other trusted member of the congregation who has been an active member for at least one year and is appointed by the elders and approved by the congregation annually.

It shall be the duty of the clerk to record the minutes of all regular and special members' meetings of the church, to preserve an accurate roll of the membership, and to render reports as requested by the pastor, elders, deacons, or by a vote requesting such by the church at a members' meeting. The clerk shall be nominated by the elders and approved by the church for a term of one year. In the absence or incapacity of the clerk the elders shall temporarily appoint a member to perform the duties of the church clerk.

The treasurer shall not be under the employ of the church. The treasurer shall ensure that all church funds are properly secured in such banks, financial institutions, or depositories as appropriate. The treasurer shall also be responsible for presenting regular reports of the account balances, revenues and expenses of the church at each members' meeting. This responsibility may be delegated with the approval of the elders. 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 annually to the elders an account of all transactions as treasurer and of the financial condition of the church. The treasurer shall be nominated by the elders and approved by the congregation to serve a term of one year.

## Section 6 - Responsibilities of the Congregation to Church Officers

The congregation shall be responsible to be thankful for them because they are God's gift (Ephesians 4:11) to lead the church and to obey and submit to the elder(s)' guidance, protection and care (Hebrews 13:17). They shall respect, highly regard, love and live in peace with them (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13), honor all elders, providing a double honor of both respect and financial support to elder(s) who excel in leadership, especially those who labor at teaching and preaching, not listening to unsubstantiated accusations about them (1 Timothy 5:17-19). They should pray for the church officers continuously, communicate concerns, suggestions and needs to them that they might better serve the flock.

## **Article 6 – Elections**

### Section 1 – Principles

The process for church elections shall be interpreted and carried out to fulfill the following principles: Substantial prayer, both individually and corporately, should be an integral part of the election process. Nominations should only proceed with the support of the elders. All candidates for church office should be treated with the grace, kindness, and honesty appropriate in evaluating fellow members. The election process shall express that spirit of mutual trust, openness, and loving consideration that is appropriate within the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Section 2 – Selection of Officers

The election of officers shall be held at a members' meeting of the church. Names of nominees to serve as elders, deacons, clerk, or treasurer shall be presented by the elders at the previous members' meeting (providing that previous meeting occurred at least eight weeks prior), and the election shall proceed as directed by the moderator.

The elders should seek recommendations and involvement from the general membership in the nomination process. Any member with reason to believe that a nominated candidate is unqualified for an office should express such concern to the elders. Members intending to speak in opposition to a candidate should express their objection to the elders as far in advance as possible before the relevant church members' meeting.

The moderator shall declare elected elders or deacons receiving a three-fourths majority of all votes cast. For all other offices, the moderator shall declare elected all persons receiving a simple majority of all votes cast; abstentions will not be considered as votes cast. Those elected shall assume their respective offices upon election, unless another date has been specified.

### Section 3 – Calling of the (Senior) Pastor

In the calling of any man to this position, the same basic process of calling an elder must be followed. In addition, however, the church must be given adequate opportunity to assess the preaching gifts of any potential (senior) pastor and, before being asked to express its judgment, must receive assurance from the elders that, having interviewed the man concerned, they are in no doubt as to his wholehearted assent to the faith and philosophy of this church. Notice of the nomination of a man to be elected to membership and called as (senior) pastor (which shall include, if necessary, election to membership of his wife if he is married) must be given at no fewer than two Sunday morning services following the nomination, prior to the vote at a members' meeting.

## **Article 7: Dispute Resolution**

Believing that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and to resolve disputes with each other in private or within the Christian Church (see, e.g., Matthew 18:15–20; 1 Corinthians 6:1–8), the church shall require its members to resolve conflict among themselves according to biblically based principles, without reliance on the secular courts. Consistent with its call to peacemaking, the church shall encourage the use of biblically based principles and the avoidance of suits of law or equity to resolve disputes between itself and those outside the church, whether Christian or pagan and whether individuals or corporate entities. The elders shall adopt policies and procedures to effect these requirements and aspirations.

## **Article 8: Indemnification**

### Section 1 – Mandatory Indemnification

If a legal claim or criminal allegation is made against a person because he or she is or was an officer, employee, or agent of the church, the church shall provide indemnification against liability and costs incurred in defending against the claim if the elders determine that the person acted (a) in good faith, (b) with the care an ordinarily prudent person in a similar position would exercise under similar circumstances, and (c) in a manner the person reasonably believed to be in the best interest of the church, and the person had no reasonable cause to believe his or her conduct was unlawful.

### Section 2 – Permissive Indemnification

At the discretion of the elders, the church also may indemnify any person who acted in good faith and reasonably believed that his or her conduct was in the church's best interest and not unlawful.

### Section 3 – Procedure

If a quorum of the elders is not available for an indemnification determination because of the number of elders seeking indemnification, the requisite determination may be made by the membership or by special legal counsel appointed by the membership.

## **Article 9: Amendments**

The Statement of Faith and Church Covenant may be amended by a three-fourths majority of the votes cast at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.

This constitution may be amended by a three-fourths majority of the votes cast at a members' meeting, provided the amendment shall have been offered in writing at the previous members' meeting, and shall have been announced from the pulpit at church services two successive Sundays prior to such vote.

The church clerk shall make available copies of this constitution or any subsequent revisions upon request of any church member.