

Constitution and Bylaws of

The Branch Community Church

Palatka, FL 32177

Constitution

Article 1: Our Name and Purpose

Section 1.1: Our Name

The Body shall be known as The Branch Community Church.

Section 1.2: Our Purpose

This congregation is organized as a church exclusively for religious, charitable, and educational purposes within the meaning of 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 (or the corresponding provisions of any future United States Revenue Law), including, but not limited to, for such purposes, the establishing and maintaining of religious worship, the buying, owning, and selling of real property, constructing and operating of buildings and structures, the operation of schools and educational facilities, the proclamation of the Gospel and biblical truth, and the winning of people to a saving trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior as well as the intentional effort to disciple individuals as they follow Jesus as Lord in their lives, serve in ministry and reach out into the community, and around the world.

Section 1.3 Mission Statement

All actions of the church shall be evaluated for consistency with the purpose statement: We exist to lead people beyond just good enough in order to experience fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Article 2- Statement of Faith

Article 2.1: Our Values

1. Exemplify Christ

Seeing and loving people the way Jesus does

2. Magnify the Gospel

Apart from Christ we can do nothing

3. Multiply Disciples

Moving from consumerism to devoted followers of Christ

4. Apply God's Word

God's truth over my opinions

5. Purposefully Praying

Calling on a God that desires to answer us

6. Intentionally Prioritizing Community

Loving people more than we love ourselves

Article 2.2:Beliefs

The Branch Community Church embraces as our Statement of Faith and incorporates by reference The Baptist Faith and Message, as adopted by the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention in the year 2000. As the Baptist Faith and Message is subsequently amended by the Southern Baptist Convention, such amendments shall be subject to approval by the membership of The Branch Community Church.

To ensure clarity regarding the church's position on certain matters, the following should be read in conjunction with and as a supplement to The Baptist Faith and Message:

1. Sexual Ethic

We believe that God intends sexual intimacy to only occur between a man and a woman who are married to each other. Any form of sexual immorality, such as adultery, fornication, homosexual or bisexual conduct, polygamy, pedophilia, bestiality, incest, pornography, or attempts to change one's biological sex, any form of sexual immorality we believe to be sinful and offensive to God based on the authority of Scripture (1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 6:18-20; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8).

2. Marriage

We believe that the term 'marriage' has only one meaning, a bond which is sanctioned by God joining one man and one woman in a single, exclusive union as delineated in Scripture. The church does not condone or recognize any alternative definition of marriage, nor permit staff members to perform such ceremonies, nor allow the use of church resources for such (Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:1-12; Hebrews 13:4).

3. Humanity

We believe that every person is equal in the sight of God and of equal value to this church regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender. All persons are to be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect, and dignity. Hateful or harassing behavior or attitudes toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accordance with Scripture, nor Christian doctrine. All forms of racism are considered offensive to God and should be rejected (Genesis 1:27; John 13:34-35; Ephesians 4:29-32).

4. Separation, Divorce, and Remarriage

We believe that God hates divorce and intends marriage to last until one spouse dies. We recognize that under certain conditions separation might be necessary, divorce might be permitted, and remarriage might be allowed. However, whether a person has a biblical reason to separate or divorce, or whether a divorced person has biblical grounds for remarriage, should be carefully evaluated in accordance with the Scriptures and in conjunction with godly counsel. When possible, the reconciliation of the separated or divorced couple is to be pursued. However, we recognize that some marriages might have one party who is unwilling to reconcile. (Genesis 1:27, 2:24; Malachi 2:13-16; Matthew 19:3-9; Mark 10:1-9; 1 Corinthians 7:10-13; Ephesians 5:22-23).

5. Sanctity of Human Life

We believe that human life is a sacred gift from God and must be respected from the moment of conception until natural death. We believe that abortion is the intentional, willful termination of

a pregnancy at any time after conception and constitutes the taking of unborn human life. Accordingly, abortions for any reasons including birth defects, gender selection, birth control, population control, or even tragic instances of rape or incest, as well as acts of encouraging, facilitation, or paying for an abortion are inconsistent with Scripture and the glory of God (Psalm 139:13-16; Isaiah 46:3).

Additionally, we oppose active intervention with the intent to produce death, including euthanasia and doctor assisted suicide, whether for the relief of suffering economic or quality of life considerations or convenience of the person, family, or society (Isaiah 46:4; Job 14:5; Acts 17:26-28).

Article 2.3: The Authority of The Branch Community Church

The Statement of Faith is not an exhaustive list of every conviction and belief of our church. The church embraces the Scriptures as its final authority in matters of faith and practice. We do believe, however, that the Statement of Faith referenced above accurately represents the teaching of the Bible. As such, all preaching and teaching, including related curriculum, shall be in agreement with the Statement of Faith, as well as this Constitution and related Bylaws.

Furthermore, the actions of the church, including those undertaken corporately or individually by the elders, deacons, church members, employees, or volunteers of The Branch Community Church in any of its ministries, shall also be in accordance with the Statement of Faith, as well as this Constitution and Bylaws. Preaching, teaching, or actions which are contrary to these documents will be handled in accordance with this Constitution and Bylaws.

Article 2.5: Dissolution

In the event of the dissolution of The Branch Community Church, all assets, including but not limited to all real property and all personal property, will become the sole property of First Baptist Church of Plant City.

Article 2.6: Amendments

The Constitution may be amended by a majority vote of members present and voting, in any regular or specially called Member Meeting. The members present at any constitutionally called Member Meeting shall be considered a quorum for the purposes of the meeting. All votes shall be tallied based on the number of votes cast by members present.

Bylaws

Article 1: Membership

Article 1.1: How Members are Received

Members may be received by any of the following means:

1. Profession of faith in Jesus Christ followed by believer's baptism.
2. Promise and receipt of membership letter from a Baptist Church.
3. Statement of prior conversion experience and believer's baptism by immersion.

Article 1.2 Membership process:

1. Covenant members of the church shall consist of persons who profess their faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, having given public testimony to their Christian faith through believer's baptism by immersion as set forth in the New Testament.
2. All candidates will be required to attend a new member's class, affirm and sign the Church Covenant, and go through an interview with an elder.
3. Membership may be refused or withdrawn through the removal process and disciplinary actions outlined in article 1.3.

Article 1.3: Membership Discipline and Dismissal

Membership may be terminated for any of the following reasons:

1. Death
2. Transfer of membership letter to another Baptist church
3. Membership taken in another church or denomination
4. At the request of the member
5. Being removed by the congregation as a result of church discipline

When a member knowingly, blatantly, and publicly ignores the direct commands and prohibitions of Scripture, principles of discipline and restoration will be applied. These principles are found in passages such as Matthew 7:1-5, 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; Galatians 6:1-2; and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. Any case of church discipline will be handled by the elders, and the elders will determine when it should be brought before the membership of the church. A two-thirds vote is required for a person to be removed from membership.

6. A member who is inactive in the church for one year may be considered for termination of membership.

Article 1.4: Associate Membership

Any part-year resident may apply for "Associate Membership." The Associate Membership qualifications, process, and responsibilities are identical to those for regular membership as described in the Church Covenant, Constitution, and Bylaws. The expectation of Associate Members is that when they are not residing in Northeast Florida they will actively be involved with their home church. Accordingly, Associate Members will not serve as elders or deacons.

Article 1.5: Responsibilities and Privileges of Membership

The expectations and responsibilities of church members can be found in the Church Covenant. Additionally, members will have the privilege of faithfully attending Member Meetings.

Article 2: Member Meetings

Article 2.1: Guidelines for Member Meetings

1. Quorum: All members present at a member meeting will form a quorum regardless of number.
2. An elder, selected by the elder body, will serve as the moderator for each Member Meeting and ensure proper meeting minutes are taken.
3. It is the right and responsibility of the elders to call all Member Meetings. The elders shall prepare the agenda for all Member Meetings and make the necessary preparations for the successful conduct of the Member Meeting.
4. All items desired to be addressed by a member in a Member Meeting must be submitted to the elders 30 days in advance in order to be considered to be placed on the agenda for a Member Meeting.
5. Minutes of Membership Meetings shall be maintained indefinitely.

Article 2.2: Different types of Membership Meetings

- A. Affirmation Meeting- Affirmation shall be a two-thirds vote by the church members present at the meeting and not by proxy. Voting members shall be those covenant members of 16 years or older. The membership will be asked to affirm the recommendations of the elders for the following items:
 - Capital purchases, building, or indebtedness activities where the value exceeds 10 percent of the annual financial ministry plan.
 - Deacon selection
 - Calling or dismissing elders
 - Changes to the church Bylaws
 - Other items the elders believe to be of significant importance
 - Exclusion of a member by action of the church.
- B. Special Member Meetings
Special Member Meetings may be called as needed at the request of the elders and would require prior notification as for regular Membership Meetings.

Article 3: Ordinances

Article 3.1: Baptism

Baptism will be by immersion and will be administered by one of the elders or with the assistance of one of the members who have been approved by the elders.

Article 3.2: Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper will be administered by the elders or with the assistance of members who have been approved by the elders. The Lord's Supper will be observed regularly as scheduled by the elders.

Article 4: Elders

As used in Scripture, the term “elder” is synonymous with “pastor” and “overseer.” Our church will use the terms “elder” and “pastor” interchangeably.

Article 4.1: Qualifications

The qualifications for elders can primarily be found in these specific Scripture passages 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-11, 1 Peter 5:1-2, and Ephesians 4:11-12. If at any time an elder is not fulfilling his role, fails to meet the biblical qualifications, or no longer desires to serve, the other elders along with the covenant members will evaluate the situation. If necessary, the elders will recommend steps to be taken and ask the membership for affirmation. The membership may provide input about an elder’s lifestyle and performance according to biblical qualifications at any time in accordance with 1 Timothy 5:19-20.

Article 4.2: Responsibilities

The elders must shepherd and lead the church. Their leadership shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Devoting themselves to the priorities of prayer and the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4).
2. Evaluating prospective new members for recommendation to the congregation (Matthew 16:13-19, Matthew 18:15-20).
3. Determining church policy (Acts 15), including recommending the annual church budget to the congregation.
4. Providing protective oversight (Acts 20:28), which includes the process of corrective church discipline.
5. Guarding against false teaching and teachers (1 Timothy 6:20-21).
6. Ordaining elders and deacons (1 Timothy 4:14, Acts 6:1-7).
7. Teaching and preaching (1 Timothy 5:17, 2 Timothy 4:1-5).
9. Praying over the sick (James 5:14).
10. Setting an example of faith for the congregation to follow (1 Peter 5:1–3).

Article 4.3: Selection

If there is a vacancy or absence of an elder position the other elders shall be responsible to nominate elder candidates and recommend them to the congregation in accordance with Bylaws section 2.2, 2. Removal of a pastor is a matter of grave concern and should be dealt with according to the Scriptures (1 Timothy 5:19; Matthew 18:15-18). The other pastors on the elder board must be in agreeance with removing the pastor and will present the removal of the pastor to the congregation.

Article 4.4: Plurality of Elders and Lead Pastor

The elders of the church shall also be referred to as the Elder Council and can be comprised of “staff elders” and “lay elders,” Where “staff” denotes those employed by the church on a full-time basis, and

“lay” denotes those employed on a part-time basis or not employed by the church. The staff and lay elders shall have equal authority but differing responsibilities as determined by the Elder Council.

The Lead Pastor shall be a member of the Elder Council. The Lead Pastor will be regarded as the first among equals within the Elder Council, and he will have no more authority than the other elders. His primary responsibility is to preach God’s word during weekly gatherings and cast vision for direction and future of the church. If there is a vacancy in the lead pastor position the Elder Council will be entrusted to nominate and interview a new Lead Pastor, and afterwards they will present the new candidate for Lead Pastor at a members meeting in accordance with bylaws section 2.2, 2.

Article 4.5: Elders and Directors of Corporation

The elders shall serve as Directors of Corporation. When signatures of the Directors of Corporation are need to transact business, the signatures of active elders are a reflection of the unity of the elders as they represent the Corporation.

Article 5: Deacons

Article 5.1: Responsibilities and Qualifications

As used in Scripture, the term “deacon” means minister or servant. The deacons, under the leadership of the elders, will serve in areas where ministering to the needs of the church is of primary importance.

Deacons will be believers of spiritual maturity and wisdom, who demonstrate servant spirits. Their qualifications are defined by specific Scripture passages in Acts 6:1-7 and 1 Timothy 3:8-13. If at any time a deacon is not fulfilling his role, fails to meet the biblical qualifications, or no longer desires to serve, the elders will evaluate the situation. If necessary, the elders will recommend steps to be taken and ask the membership for affirmation in accordance with bylaws section 2.2.

Article 5.2: Selection

As needs in the church arise, there will be an active search initiated by the elders for men who meet the biblical qualifications and who have been active members. The church members may also recommend names of potential candidates. The elders will examine each candidate to determine if they meet the biblical qualifications and present them to the membership for affirmation in accordance with bylaws section 2.2. There is neither a preset number of deacons, nor a preset term of service.

Article 6: Staff

6.1: Administrative Staff

The administrative staff shall consist of those employees who assist the elders. The administrative staff shall be under the direction of the Elder Council. Compensation for administrative staff shall be determined by the Elder Council according to the annual approved budget in the stewardship business meeting according to bylaws section 2.2, 1.

6.2: Ministry Team Leaders

The Elder Council will be responsible for selecting and approving any team leader. Each ministry in the church will have a team leader leading the specified ministry. The Elder Council will assign an elder for oversight of each ministry team and select a team leader. The team leader and assigned elder will bring recommendations for team members to the elders for approval. The ministry team leaders may then enlist members to help assist carrying out their mission. However, the elders can at any point remove a team leader or ministry team member from their area of responsibility. Budget and cost expenditures for each ministry team shall be determined by the appointed elder of oversight, along with the aid of the ministry team leader.

All other items not specifically covered by this section of bylaws will be governed by the personnel handbook.

Article 7: Designated Funds

From time to time the church, at the discretion of the elders, may establish various designated funds to accomplish specific purposes. Contributions to these established funds shall be used for the intended purposes. Contributions marked with any other designation will not create a financial obligation to use the contributions for a particular purpose, but will be deemed as advisory rather than mandatory in nature.

Article 8: Amendments

Recommendations for amendments to the Bylaws may be brought to the elders by the membership of the church. After prayerful consideration by the elders, amendments to the bylaws may be presented at a special-called Member Meeting provided each proposed amendment has been presented to the membership in writing at least thirty days prior to the meeting. Amendments to the Bylaws shall require a two-thirds majority vote of church members present and voting, and not by proxy.