

Constitution

Hope Community Church

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Scripture: We believe that the Bible, the Old Testament consisting of its 39 books and the New Testament consisting of its 27, is God's inspired, inerrant (in the original manuscripts), and authoritative revelation on all matters to which it speaks. We believe God has providentially preserved reliable copies of the original manuscripts and these copies are inspired and authoritative on all matters to which they speak (Jn. 14:26; 16:13).

Attributes of God: God is an invisible, living and active personal spirit who is: eternal, unchanging, omnipresent, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, just, merciful, holy, long-suffering, compassionate, jealous, a hater of evil, transcendent in being, and immanent in providential and redemptive activity. He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe and is sovereign over all things.

The Trinity: We believe that there is one God who eternally exists in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God is one being and three persons each of which will, feel, know and possess all the attributes of deity (Dt. 6:4; 2 Cor. 13:14; Matt. 28:19; Matt. 3:16, 17).

God the Father: God the Father is sovereign over all things past, present and future (Gen. 1:1; Acts 14:17; Eph. 1:3-12).

Jesus Christ: Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, is the only begotten Son of God (Jn. 3:16) having two distinct natures, one fully human and the other fully divine, yet these two natures are inseparable and comprise one person (Jn. 1:13; 8:58). He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life (Heb. 4:15), died on the cross for the forgiveness of sins (I Pet. 3:18), and was raised bodily on the third day from the dead (I Cor. 15:4). He ascended into heaven where he sits at the Father's right hand and intercedes for those who are believers (Rom 8:34).

Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity who is sent by the Father and the Son (Jn. 14:16; 15:26) to convict, guide, reveal truth, bestow spiritual gifts, indwell, sanctify and empower those who have saving faith in Jesus for life and ministry (Jn. 16:7-15; 14:16-17; I Cor. 12:4-7; Eph. 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:2).

Humankind: Because people are created in God's image they have inherent value (Gen. 1:26) and are created to be in relationship with God (Jn. 17:3). However, all people have inherited sin from their original ancestor, Adam (Rom. 5:12), and have themselves sinned by rebelling against God (Rom. 3:23). All people are thoroughly corrupted by evil, slaves to sin and are therefore separated from God and are deserving of condemnation (Rom. 3:9-20; Rom. 6:6, 23).

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Salvation: Since God loves people he provided a sufficient payment for their sins through his grace by the atoning and substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross (1 Pet. 3:18; Isa. 53:4-6; 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph 2:8-9). Those who have faith in Jesus Christ have been justified, redeemed, reconciled to God, set free from slavery to sin, given eternal life, and given the gift of the Holy spirit to indwell them and help them grow in holiness (Rom. 3:24; 5:11; 6:22; I Jn. 5:13; Eph. 1:13). Faith consists of the knowledge of, affirmation of, and trust in Jesus and his redeeming work and resurrection from the dead (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 10:9), repentance (turning away from an ongoing pattern of sin: I Jn. 3:6), and submission to Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10:9; Acts 10:21; 2 Cor. 7:10). Those who have faith in Jesus are called to live holy lives that are characterized by love and good works (Rom. 6:1-12; Mk. 12:29-31; Eph. 2:10).

The Church: The universal church is the sum of all those who have faith in Jesus and it exists for the purpose of glorifying God. Believers also gather in local assemblies where they carry out their purpose of glorifying God in worship, prayer, fellowship, teaching, service, evangelism, discipleship, etc. Jesus is the head of the church; he builds it and is sovereign over it (Col. 1:18; Mt. 16:18; Eph. 5:24). All believers have been given spiritual gifts in order to edify one another (I Cor. 12:7). The church is called by Jesus to make disciples of all nations, to baptize, and to teach people to obey the commands of Jesus (Mt. 28:18-20).

The Ordinances: Jesus gave the church two ordinances to observe: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Those who have professed faith in Jesus are to be baptized by immersion (whenever physically possible) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Baptism symbolizes believers' vicarious death, burial and resurrection with Jesus which happened when they placed their faith in him (Mt. 28:19; Rom. 6:3-9). The Lord's Supper is to be regularly celebrated in order to remember Jesus' death on the cross for the forgiveness of sins and to anticipate his return at the end of the age (I Cor. 11:24-25; Mt. 26:26-29).

End Times: Jesus will personally return to the earth, the dead will be bodily resurrected, and Jesus will judge all people; believers will live forever with God in Heaven and nonbelievers will be condemned to Hell where they will be eternally separated from God's loving presence (Mt. 24:30; 25:31-32; Rev. 20:11-15). The heavens and the earth as they are known will pass away and God will make a new heaven and a new earth where believers will dwell eternally in the presence of God (Rev. 20:11; 21:1-5). No one knows the time that these things will happen nor should anyone become overly preoccupied with trying to figure it out because only God the Father knows (Mt. 24:36-41). Believers are to always be ready for Jesus' return, whether it be near or far off and are to demonstrate their readiness by living lives that are pleasing and honoring to him (Mt. 24:32-25:24; 2 pet. 3:11).

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Section 2: Governance

According to the Bible, the church is ultimately governed not by people but by Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus, though unseen, is the “Chief Shepherd” of the church (I Pet. 5:4) and His word, as recorded in the Bible, is the guideline for its activities (Ps. 119, II Tim. 3:16). In His word, He points out the need for godly elders (Titus 1:5) as well as the need for every Christian to be an active participant in the local church (I Cor. 12).

While there are many models for making godly corporate decisions (both in the Bible and throughout church history) we believe a form of “elder governance”, with a high level of congregational involvement including election of new elders, votes of confidence for existing elders, and votes to decide certain issues (changes in the constitution, purchase or sale of land or buildings, and formation of the annual budget,), is the best way for HCC to accomplish its mission. (Acts 14:23; 15)

In this structure, the elders have the responsibility for the majority of daily decisions necessary for the ongoing oversight and care of the church including shepherding the flock (I Pet. 5:1-3), refuting those who contradict the truth (Acts 20:28-31, Titus 1:9), managing the church of God (I Tim. 3:5, 5:17), praying for the sick (James 5:14), etc.

Even though the elders are ultimately responsible for the affairs of the church, it is necessary, that the congregation, which is made up of people who are heavily invested in God’s work at Hope Community Church, contribute its time, prayer and insight to the elders in the decision making process on some of the most significant decisions in the life of HCC. These matters include: 1) voting for new elders, 2) votes of confidence for existing elders, 3) votes regarding changes in the constitution, 4) votes regarding purchase of land and/or buildings, 5) votes regarding the annual formation of the budget and 6) input regarding the hiring of pastoral staff, and 7) input for renting buildings or land to other organizations.

Process for Selection of New Elders

(An incoming senior pastor of the church will be subject to the same process.)

1. The elders will determine when there is a need to add elders to the board and they will announce this to the congregation. A man who desires to be an elder may also initiate this process.
2. With the Biblical qualifications in mind (I Tim. 3, Titus 2 & I Peter 5) elders and members of the congregation will be asked to prayerfully submit the names of men for consideration as elders. Individuals are also encouraged to nominate themselves if they desire to fulfill the role of elder. A candidate should already be an active member of HCC, have good character & sound doctrine, seek the office (I Tim. 3:1) and be committed to serving at HCC.
3. Elders will consider the people whose names are submitted and shall inform those who appear to meet the biblical qualifications. When a man is informed by the elders, he shall be asked to engage in prayerful self-appraisal and evaluation in light of the Scriptural qualifications.
4. Those who do seek the office will be interviewed by the board of elders in regard to doctrine, character, and spiritual gifting (leadership and teaching; Rom.12:8; I Tim. 3:2) and must sign the HCC doctrinal statement. They may also be required to provide character references. Nominees not selected at this point shall be informed by the elders of

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the reason for not being selected. Only one nominee per open elder position shall be considered from this point on.

5. Upon agreement of the elders, the candidate will be made an apprentice elder for six months. In this role, the candidate will sit in and give input at all elder board meetings, but will not possess the authority of an elder and therefore will not be included in making the final decisions. (The duration of an apprentice elder may be shortened at the discretion of the elders if the elder board has less than four elders.)

6. After a period of six months of serving as an apprentice elder, the elders will decide whether or not they believe the candidate should: 1) be presented to the congregation for a vote to become a full member of the board of elders, 2) continue as an apprentice elder, or 3) no longer be considered for the role of elder.

7. If the elders and the candidate believe he should become an elder, the congregation will be given an opportunity to evaluate his character, speak with him regarding any concerns, ask questions of him at a congregational interview, and vote on whether or not they believe he should be an elder. A 2/3 majority of the members of the church must affirm the candidate for the position of elder. (A 2/3 majority consists of more than 66.7% of those who vote yes or no.)

8. If it is determined by the members that he is to become an elder, an announcement will be made to the congregation and time will be designated for the church to pray and confirm the new elder.

Removal of an Elder

Should an elder sin in such a way that he would no longer be considered “above reproach” (according to the qualifications listed in I Tim. 3, Titus 1, and I Pet. 5), the procedure described in Matt. 18:15-20 and I Tim. 5:19-21 shall be enacted. The first step, as with any Christian, is to go to the elder and show him his sin. Second, if he does not listen and repent, go with another person (preferably an elder). Third, if he does not listen to the two of you, bring the accusation to the entire board of elders. Fourth, the elders will discipline the sinning elder as they believe is most appropriate according to Scripture for the sake of the purity of the church and the restoration of the sinner.

Should the elder repent of his sin, at any point in the process, he is to be forgiven and restored to fellowship. In many cases, however, it still may be best if the leader resigns his position. By sinning, he has violated the trust of those he has led. If the leader does not voluntarily resign, it is the responsibility of the elders to decide whether or not he should be removed (a 2/3 vote of the elders is necessary for the removal of an elder).

Removal of the Senior Pastor

The Senior Pastor may be dismissed upon recommendation of the Board of Elders and two-thirds vote of the church members.

Vote of Confidence for Current Elders

Every three years each elder shall be brought before the members for a vote of confidence. (Since pastoral staff members will be evaluated every six months by the board of elders, those who also serve as elders will not be subject to a vote of confidence by the congregation.) Votes of confidence shall take place at the Elders Update closest to the end of his three year term. (For elders who held the office of elder prior to the adoption of this constitution they will serve a three year term (starting from the time they first became

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elders) before being subject to a vote of confidence.) Each member will be reminded of the biblical qualifications of an elder and given an opportunity to affirm or deny his or her confidence in the elder's qualifications for serving in this role by means of secret ballot. A majority of the members of the church must affirm that the man meets the biblical qualifications in order for him to remain on the board of elders. (A majority consists of more than 50% of those who vote yes or no.)

Process for (but not limited to): Hiring of Pastoral Staff, and Renting of Buildings or Land to other organizations. (The elders are required to bring these issues to the congregation to receive input).

1. When the need arises, the elders will work together to arrive at a proposal to be given to the congregation regarding hiring of pastoral staff, and renting of buildings or land to other organizations. The elders may (but are not required to) form a "study team" to do research and/or seek input from the congregation to help form an original proposal for the church.
2. After prayer and consideration, the elders and/or "study team" will present the matter to the congregation at an "Elder's Update." The issue is introduced to the people and explained as thoroughly as necessary. The congregation discusses the matter with the elders until all views are heard and understood. The elders must be committed to listening and understanding those who speak and the congregation must be committed to honestly expressing their understanding and concerns on the pending decision. Since the goal is to receive congregational input, the elders may seek additional feedback by means of more meetings, questionnaires, surveys, congregational polls, and other methods to be sure the communication process is open and forthright. If the elders deem it prudent they have the option to submit an issue to the congregation to be decided by a congregational vote.
3. The elders meet to discuss the biblical principles, suggestions, ideas and issues brought up by the congregation. They seek God's direction and, Lord willing, they will make the appropriate decisions. Again, at this step, it is imperative that the elders be spiritually sensitive men as they seek not to be served, but to serve Christ and His congregation.
4. The elders shall announce their decision to the congregation and provide an appropriate explanation.

Process for (but not limited to): Changes in the Constitution, Purchase or Lease or Sale of buildings or Land, and the Formation of the Annual Budget. (The elders are required to bring these issues to the congregation to be decided by congregational vote.)

1. When the need arises, the elders will work together to arrive at a proposal to be given to the congregation regarding changes in the constitution, purchase or lease or sale of land or buildings, and the formation of the annual budget. This proposal shall be written and distributed to the congregation no less than seven days prior to a congregational vote.
2. At the ensuing elder's update, members will have the opportunity to ask questions for clarification of the proposal as well as to voice their opinions.
3. A congregational vote may be held in one of two ways (to be determined by the board of elders):
 - A. The congregation may vote at the elder's update following the discussion of the proposal.

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- B. The congregation may be given ballots to be returned to the elders at a later date in order to allow members time for more prayer, thought and discussion of the proposal before they actually vote.
- 4. A simple majority is sufficient to approve of any proposal unless otherwise directed by the board of elders.

Congregational Votes

In order to assure that votes are carried out in a fair and forthright manner the following guidelines shall be observed:

1. Only active members of the church 18 years old and older will be allowed to vote (the difference between an “active” and an “inactive” member is explained in the membership policy).
2. Votes shall be made by ballot or by raising of the hand at the discretion of the chairman of the board of elders (unless otherwise determined by the board of elders).
3. Two elders and two members who volunteer will tally the results of the vote.
4. Results of the vote shall be tallied and announced immediately following the vote.
5. 25 of the church’s members must be present to constitute a quorum.

The congregation will be informed no later than seven days prior to the meeting as to what issues they will be voting on.

Membership

In order to implement the principles of voting, accountability, and commitment in the local church, HCC recognizes the need for formal membership. (See section III. “Membership” for details)

Elders Decision Making Process

Since there is a plurality of elders, the elders will always strive, among themselves, to be unified and to reach a consensus. If consensus is not possible, the decision will be determined by a vote requiring 2/3’s of the elders’ approval.

The chairman of the elder board shall be elected by a majority of the elders annually. It is preferred that someone other than the senior pastor be the chairman of the elder board in order that both the authority and responsibility be distributed.

Although the elders are responsible for the oversight of the church, we at HCC believe in the priesthood of all believers. Therefore, the elders desire to hear and follow through on concerns or suggestions that the people in the congregation have. Open and honest communication between the elders and the congregation is essential to the ongoing health of the church. There will be an Elders Update every quarter (February, May, August, and November) for this purpose. (The elders may call additional Elders Updates when special circumstances arise.)

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Section 3: Membership

Criteria for Membership

HCC membership shall be open to anyone who:

- A. has personally accepted Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and has been baptized.
- B. is personally involved with and committed to the people and ministries of HCC.
- C. is in agreement with the doctrinal beliefs of the church and is willing to abide by the governance of the church as stated in the church constitution.
- D. is pursuing a growing relationship with God characterized by obedience to His word.
- E. is willing, if necessary, to submit to the New Testament practice of church discipline and HCC's procedures for carrying it out as stated in the constitution.

Admittance to Membership

All individuals who meet the above criteria and who desire to be committed to this local church may become members of HCC through the following procedure.

1. Reasonable attendance at HCC activities for at least 4 months

A period of time is necessary in order for each potential member to become familiar with HCC and for HCC to become familiar with him or her.

2. Attend a membership class

This course will present the history, mission, strategy, doctrine, and basic ministries of HC.

At the end of this course, individuals desiring membership will be given a "Commitment to Membership" form to read, pray over, complete, sign and submit to the membership Team.

All people under 18 years of age who desire to become members of HCC must receive the written consent of their parents or legal guardian.

3. Personal Interview

When the form is received by the membership team, a member of the membership team will contact the person considering membership and will set up a time for a personal interview with the membership team. This meeting is intended for the applicant to ask any questions about the church or church membership and to verbalize his/her personal testimony, present walk with the Lord and to explain why he/she wants to become a member. The team may also ask questions regarding these issues.

4. Signed "Commitment to Membership"

The "Commitment to Membership" form will be signed by the membership team.

This form formalizes the applicant's commitment to HCC and verifies that the applicant has met the criteria for membership. It also serves as a formal record of one's membership.

5. Presentation of New Members

Periodically, new members will be introduced to the congregation and will be given an opportunity to profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior and to give a brief explanation of why they want to become members.

Expectations of Members

Members of HCC are people who are actively and intimately interrelated to the other parts of the church body. Therefore, they are expected to be involved in loving, encouraging,

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and praying for others in the church; faithfully attending HCC functions; serving according to their giftedness; financially supporting God's work at HCC; and doing their part to preserve the unity of the church. In addition, since members are an essential part of the decision making process for the church, members are expected to attend the quarterly Elders Updates whenever possible in order to vote, give input, and pray for the issues presented. All members who are 18 years old or older may participate in church votes.

Positions Requiring Membership

Membership is a requirement for all elders, teachers and key ministry leaders as identified by the elders.

Removal from Membership

A person may be removed from membership:

1. By submitting a request in writing to the membership team for removal.
2. By remaining uninvolved in church activities for 6 months or more. In this scenario,
 - A. The membership team will contact the person after 3 months or absence.
 - B. If 3 more months elapse and the member is still uninvolved in church activities, his or her membership will be considered inactive and he or she will be unable to participate in church votes. (Exceptions to this will be made in the case of missionaries, those physically unable to attend, and a few other possible situations).
 - C. If 6 more months elapse and the individual is still uninvolved in church activities his or her membership from the church can be withdrawn by the membership team.
 - D. In the event that membership is terminated, the process for reinstatement will be the same as the process stated above.
3. By becoming a member of another church.
4. By decision of the elders in a situation involving church discipline.

Membership Team

The membership team is responsible for administering the membership policy for HCC. The elders will select the leader of the team. The team leader will select the team members after seeking approval for each member from the elders.

Section 4: Church Discipline Policy

Section 1, The Purposes of Church Discipline

1. The primary objective of church discipline is to lovingly restore the sinner to right relationship with God and others (Mt. 18:15; I Cor. 5:5).
2. The secondary objective of church discipline is to protect and maintain the purity of the church. When the church knowingly continues to allow a person who is guilty of a serious sin and who has not repented of it to fellowship with the church, the church is condoning the sin and communicating that this sin is acceptable (I Cor. 5:6). When a church permits such activity to continue the whole church is infected and becomes guilty of sin (Rev. 2:15-16, 20).

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Section 2, Sins that May Invoke the Church Discipline Process

Church discipline is certainly not intended to be invoked lightly, but is intended only for those sins that are considered serious. Such sins may constitute one-time offenses or patterns of ongoing behavior (e.g. a one-time occurrence of adultery or an ongoing pattern of gossip). Such serious sins include but are not limited to the following list:

1. Sins against God including but not limited to: blasphemy (showing irreverence or contempt for God, or claiming the attributes of God for oneself), heresy (holding to and/or propagating false doctrine), and apostasy (abandonment of the faith, denying association with Christ, idolatry, worshiping a deity other than the Triune God of the Old and New Testaments).
2. Sexual sins including but not limited to: adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, pedophilia, rape, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment.
3. Sins against the church including but not limited to: gossip, dissension, causing division, or any other sin that threatens the overall unity of the fellowship of believers.
4. Sins against one's family including but not limited to: spouse abuse, child abuse, unbiblical divorce, abandonment, refusing to economically support oneself or one's family, or anything that seriously jeopardizes the sanctity or the well-being of a person's family.
5. Sins against society including but not limited to: murder, assault, larceny, hate crimes, menacing, fraud, or commission of any other serious crime.
6. Sins of intemperance including but not limited to: drunkenness, alcoholism, drug use, drug abuse, use of pornography, excessive and inappropriate demonstration of anger, excessive gambling, excessive laziness, or any other sin that demonstrates a serious lack of self-control causing harm to the individual and/or to those in association with the individual.

Section 3, Procedure

General principles regarding the church discipline procedure: the number of people involved in the process should always be minimal (Mt. 18:15); such discipline shall be fair and impartial (I Tim. 5:21), the elders shall exercise reasonable discipline appropriate to the circumstances (Mt. 18:15-20 compared to I Cor. 5:2-5, 13). The following general guidelines shall be used:

Step 1: Individual Confrontation

If any member of the church shall have knowledge concerning another member's (member here refers to anyone who attends the church and is not limited to official members of the church only) commission of a serious sin, the member shall talk to the alleged offender about his or her sin. The purpose of this step is to clear up potential misunderstanding and to resolve the issue just between these two members, and, if applicable, to facilitate the repentance of the wrongdoer.

If appropriate, the confronting individual may first choose to consult with an elder of the church regarding the elder's involvement. Appropriate circumstances may involve sexual harassment, a sin is grievous, or when the alleged offender is a staff member or other leader in the church. In these situations it might be more appropriate for an elder to handle a confrontation.

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Step 2: Involvement of an Elder of the Church

If the situation is not resolved after the alleged offender is confronted by the individual, the confronting individual should consult with an elder of the church. If the elder believes the allegation to be meritorious, then he shall pursue the matter further. This may involve the elder meeting individually with the alleged offender in order to hear his or her side of the story, or, perhaps, meeting with both the confronting individual and the alleged offender. If the issues are resolved at this point, no further steps will be taken.

If the issues are not resolved, the elder has several available options including but not limited to: 1) a determination that no serious sin was committed, 2) a determination that there is insufficient evidence to pursue the matter, 3) an acceptance of the offender's confession and repentance with designated terms of restoration (e.g. meeting with a Christian counselor, meeting with the elder once a week for six months for accountability, etc.), 4) a consultation with other elders regarding how to handle the matter, 5) a request for another elder to handle the case. If the nature of the alleged offense so warrants, the elder may suspend the individual from attending church functions or activities until the matter has been fully resolved. Also, he may report the incident to the appropriate government agency (social service, police, etc.) when required by law or the nature of the activity. If, however, all of the foregoing are unproductive, the elder shall then bring the matter before the board of elders.

Step 3: Involvement of the Board of Elders

If the matter is unresolved in the two previous steps, the elder involved in step 2 will present to the board of elders all relevant facts germane to the situation. Generally speaking, most cases that progress this far will be: 1) when the alleged offender does not admit to committing the offense, but there is sufficient evidence to establish commission of the offense, 2) the alleged offender has confessed to committing the sin but is unrepentant, or 3) the alleged offender has committed repeated, serious offenses. The board of elders will then vote whether or not the matter should be brought to a hearing. A simple majority vote of the elder board shall be sufficient for further referral.

Step 4: Hearing Before the Board of Elders

1. The elders – The full board of elders may hear the matter or delegate the responsibility of hearing to specific named members of the board of elders. Elders with a conflict of interest must be excluded from participation in the matter. Unless excluded the chairman of the board will oversee the hearing.
2. Rights of the alleged offender – The alleged offender will have the following rights: 1) right of written notification of the time, place and nature of any proceedings given at least two weeks prior or as agreed upon, 2) right of written notification of the alleged offenses including a detailed description of the alleged offenses, 3) right to confront his or her accusers at the hearing, 4) right to be accompanied at any proceedings by any desired assisting parties.
3. Information gathering – The board of elders shall gather and consider all relevant information about the matter prior to rendering its decision. This may involve, but is not limited to: 1) questioning of persons who have relevant information, 2) reviewing all relevant documents, 3) reviewing all relevant court documents from proceedings of

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- public record, 4) any and all other information deemed relevant and material to the matter.
4. Decision – After all relevant information has been gathered, the elders involved in the hearing will deliberate as to whether or not the alleged offender is guilty or not, and if the alleged offender I found guilty, what disciplinary action should be taken.
 5. Possible disciplinary action – If the elders find the alleged offender guilty, they have several options for disciplinary action at their disposal including but not limited to: 1) expulsion from the church (if this occurs terms of re-admittance will be determined), 2) temporary or permanent removal from ministry position or any position of service within the church, 3) reconciliation with offended parties within or without the church, 4) acts of service within the church community, 5) meeting with a Christian counselor, 6) meeting with an elder for a certain period of time for accountability, 7) reporting information to an appropriate government agency (social services, police, etc.), 8) involvement in a drug or alcohol treatment center, 9) signing and abiding by a restoration contract. Failure to abide by the disciplinary directives of the elders may result in further disciplinary action.

Step 5: Public Disclosure

Every effort will be made to keep all disciplinary matters confidential. Only when it is necessary to protect members of the church or to protect the unity of the church, will notification of a member's expulsion from the church or information about a church discipline proceeding be disclosed to the members of the church.